

Aus der
Büchersammlung des Capitäns
Th. Dempster Gordon.

Geschenk des k. Forstrathes G. Dürig
an die k. Bibliothek.

Langl.

39^a
2

T. Dy

lin

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.
VOL. CXX.

DOMBEY AND SON BY CHARLES DICKENS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

COLLECTION

OF

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

1887

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

NEW YORK

1887

D E A L I N G S

WITH THE FIRM OF

DOMBEY AND SON

WHOLESALE, RETAIL, AND FOR EXPORTATION.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

L E I P Z I G

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1847.



DOMBEY AND SON.

CHAPTER I.

New faces.

THE Major, more blue-faced and staring — more over-ripe, as it were, than ever — and giving vent, every now and then, to one of the horse's coughs, not so much of necessity as in a spontaneous explosion of importance, walked arm-in-arm with Mr. Dombey up the sunny side of the way, with his cheeks swelling over his tight stock, his legs majestically wide apart, and his great head wagging from side to side, as if he were remonstrating within himself on being such a captivating object. They had not walked many yards, before the Major encountered somebody he knew, nor many yards farther before the Major encountered somebody else he knew, but he merely shook his fingers at them as he passed, and led Mr. Dombey on: pointing out the localities as they went, and enlivening the walk with any current scandal suggested by them.

In this manner the Major and Mr. Dombey were walking arm-in-arm, much to their own satisfaction, when they beheld advancing towards them, a wheeled chair, in which a lady was seated, indolently steering her carriage by a kind of rudder in front, while it was propelled by some unseen power in the rear. Although the lady was not young, she was very blooming in the face — quite rosy — and her dress and attitude were perfectly juvenile. Walking by the side of the chair, and carrying her

gossamer parasol with a proud and weary air, as if so great an effort must be soon abandoned and the parasol dropped, sauntered a much younger lady, very handsome, very haughty, very wilful, who tossed her head and drooped her eyelids, as though, if there were anything in all the world worth looking into, save a mirror, it certainly was not the earth or sky.

"Why, what the devil have we here, Sir!" cried the Major, stopping as this little cavalcade drew near.

"My dearest Edith!" drawled the lady in the chair, "Major Bagstock!"

The Major no sooner heard the voice, than he relinquished Mr. Dombey's arm, darted forward, took the hand of the lady in the chair and pressed it to his lips. With no less gallantry, the Major folded both his gloves upon his heart, and bowed low to the other lady. And now, the chair having stopped, the motive power became visible in the shape of a flushed page pushing behind, who seemed to have in part out-grown and in part out-pushed his strength, for when he stood upright he was tall, and wan, and thin, and his plight appeared the more forlorn from his having injured the shape of his hat, by butting at the carriage with his head to urge it forward, as is sometimes done by elephants in Oriental countries.

"Joe Bagstock," said the Major to both ladies, "is a proud and happy man for the rest of his life."

"You false creature," said the old lady in the chair, insipidly. "Where do you come from? I can't bear you."

"Then suffer old Joe to present a friend, Ma'am," said the Major promptly, "as a reason for being tolerated. Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Skewton." The lady in the chair was gracious. "Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Granger." The lady with the parasol was faintly conscious of Mr. Dombey's taking off his hat, and bowing low. "I am delighted, Sir," said the Major, "to have this opportunity."

The Major seemed in earnest, for he looked at all the three, and leered in his ugliest manner.

“Mrs. Skewton, Dombey,” said the Major, “makes havoc in the heart of old Josh.”

Mr. Dombey signified that he didn’t wonder at it.

“You perfidious goblin,” said the lady in the chair, “have done! How long have you been here, bad man?”

“One day,” replied the Major.

“And can you be a day, or even a minute,” returned the lady, slightly settling her false curls and false eyebrows with her fan, and showing her false teeth, set off by her false complexion, “in the garden of what’s-its-name —”

“Eden I suppose, Mama,” interrupted the younger lady, scornfully.

“My dear Edith,” said the other, “I cannot help it. I never can remember those frightful names — without having your whole Soul and Being inspired by the sight of Nature; by the perfume,” said Mrs. Skewton, rustling a handkerchief that was faint and sickly with essences, “of her artless breath, you creature!”

The discrepancy between Mrs. Skewton’s fresh enthusiasm of words, and forlornly faded manner, was hardly less observable than that between her age, which was about seventy, and her dress, which would have been youthful for twenty-seven. Her attitude in the wheeled chair (which she never varied) was one in which she had been taken in a barouche, some fifty years before, by a then fashionable artist who had appended to his published sketch the name of Cleopatra: in consequence of a discovery made by the critics of the time, that it bore an exact resemblance to that Princess as she reclined on board her galley. Mrs. Skewton was a beauty then, and bucks threw wine-glasses over their heads by dozens in her honour. The beauty and the barouche had both passed away, but she still preserved the attitude, and for this reason expressly, maintained the wheeled chair and

the butting page: there being nothing whatever, except the attitude, to prevent her from walking.

"Mr. Dombey is devoted to Nature, I trust?" said Mrs. Skewton, settling her diamond brooch. And by the way, she chiefly lived upon the reputation of some diamonds, and her family connections.

"My friend Dombey, Ma'am," returned the Major, "may be devoted to her in secret, but a man who is paramount in the greatest city in the universe —"

"No one can be a stranger," said Mrs. Skewton, "to Mr. Dombey's immense influence."

As Mr. Dombey acknowledged the compliment with a bend of his head, the younger lady glancing at him, met his eyes.

"You reside here, Madam?" said Mr. Dombey, addressing her.

"No, we have been to a great many places. To Harrowgate, and Scarborough, and into Devonshire. We have been visiting, and resting here and there. Mama likes change."

"Edith of course does not," said Mrs. Skewton, with a ghastly archness.

"I have not found that there is any change in such places," was the answer, delivered with supreme indifference.

"They libel me. There is only one change, Mr. Dombey," observed Mrs. Skewton, with a mincing sigh, "for which I really care, and that I fear I shall never be permitted to enjoy. People cannot spare one. But seclusion and contemplation are my what 's-his-name —"

"If you mean Paradise, Mama, you had better say so, to render yourself intelligible," said the younger lady.

"My dearest Edith," returned Mrs. Skewton, "you know that I am wholly dependant upon you for those odious names. I assure you, Mr. Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I

have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows — and china."

This curious association of objects, suggesting a remembrance of the celebrated bull who got by mistake into a crockery shop, was received with perfect gravity by Mr. Dombey, who intimated his opinion that Nature was, no doubt, a very respectable institution.

"What I want," drawled Mrs. Skewton, pinching her shrivelled throat, "is heart." It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase. "What I want, is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial."

We were, indeed.

"In short," said Mrs. Skewton, "I want Nature everywhere. It would be so extremely charming."

"Nature is inviting us away now, Mama, if you are ready," said the younger lady, curling her handsome lip. At this hint, the wan page, who had been surveying the party over the top of the chair, vanished behind it as if the ground had swallowed him up.

"Stop a moment, Withers!" said Mrs. Skewton, as the chair began to move; calling to the page with all the languid dignity with which she had called in days of yore to a coachman with a wig, cauliflower nosegay, and silk stockings. "Where are you staying, abomination?"

The Major was staying at the Royal Hotel, with his friend Dombey.

"You may come and see us any evening when you are good," lisped Mrs. Skewton. "If Mr. Dombey will honour us, we shall be happy. Withers, go on!"

The Major again pressed to his blue lips the tips of the fingers that were disposed on the ledge of the wheeled chair with careful carelessness; after the Cleopatra model: and Mr. Dombey

bowed. The elder lady honoured them both with a very gracious smile and a girlish wave of her hand; the younger lady with the very slightest inclination of her head that common courtesy allowed.

The last glimpse of the wrinkled face of the mother, with that patched colour on it which the sun made infinitely more haggard and dismal than any want of colour could have been, and of the proud beauty of the daughter with her graceful figure and erect deportment, engendered such an involuntary disposition on the part of both the Major and Mr. Dombey to look after them, that they both turned at the same moment. The Page, nearly as much aslant as his own shadow, was toiling after the chair, uphill, like a slow battering-ram; the top of Cleopatra's bonnet was fluttering in exactly the same corner to the inch as before; and the Beauty, loitering by herself a little in advance, expressed in all her elegant form, from head to foot, the same supreme disregard of everything and everybody.

"I tell you what, Sir," said the Major, as they resumed their walk again. "If Joe Bagstock were a younger man, there's not a woman in the world whom he'd prefer for Mrs. Bagstock to that woman. By George, Sir!" said the Major, "she's superb!"

"Do you mean the daughter?" inquired Mr. Dombey.

"Is Joey B. a turnip, Dombey," said the Major, "that he should mean the mother."

"You were complimentary to the mother," returned Mr. Dombey.

"An ancient flame, Sir," chuckled Major Bagstock. "Devilish ancient. I humour her."

"She impresses me as being perfectly genteel," said Mr. Dombey.

"Genteel, Sir," said the Major, stopping short, and staring in his companion's face. "The Honourable Mrs. Skewton, Sir,

is sister to the late Lord Feenix, and aunt to the present Lord. The family are not wealthy — they 're poor, indeed — and she lives upon a small jointure; but if you come to blood, Sir!" The Major gave a flourish with his stick and walked on again, in despair of being able to say what you came to, if you came to that.

"You addressed the daughter, I observed," said Mr. Dombey, after a short pause, "as Mrs. Granger."

"Edith Skewton, Sir," returned the Major, stopping short again, and punching a mark in the ground with his cane, to represent her, "married (at eighteen) Granger of Ours;" whom the Major indicated by another punch. "Granger, Sir," said the Major, tapping the last ideal portrait, and rolling his head, emphatically, "was Colonel of Ours; a de-vilish handsome fellow, Sir, of forty-one. He died, Sir, in the second year of his marriage." The Major ran the representative of the deceased Granger through and through the body with his walking-stick, and went on again, carrying his stick over his shoulder.

"How long is this ago?" asked Mr. Dombey, making another halt.

"Edith Granger, Sir," replied the Major, shutting one eye, putting his head on one side, passing his cane into his left hand, and smoothing his shirt-frill with his right, "is, at this present time, not quite thirty. And, damme, Sir," said the Major, shouldering his stick once more, and walking on again, "she 's a peerless woman!"

"Was there any family?" asked Mr. Dombey presently.

"Yes, Sir," said the Major. "There was a boy."

Mr. Dombey's eyes sought the ground, and a shade came over his face.

"Who was drowned, Sir," pursued the Major, "when a child of four or five years old."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Dombey, raising his head.

"By the upsetting of a boat in which his nurse had no business to have put him," said the Major. "That's *his* history. Edith Granger is Edith Granger still; but if tough old Joey B., Sir, were a little younger and a little richer, the name of that immortal paragon should be Bagstock."

The Major heaved his shoulders, and his cheeks, and laughed more like an over-fed Mephistopheles than ever, as he said the words.

"Provided the lady made no objection, I suppose?" said Mr. Dombey coldly.

"By Gad, Sir," said the Major, "the Bagstock breed are not accustomed to that sort of obstacle. Though it's true enough that Edith might have married twen-ty times, but for being proud, Sir, proud."

Mr. Dombey seemed, by his face, to think no worse of her for that.

"It's a great quality after all," said the Major. "By the Lord, it's a high quality! Dombey! You are proud yourself, and your friend, Old Joe, respects you for it, Sir."

With this tribute to the character of his ally, which seemed to be wrung from him by the force of circumstances and the irresistible tendency of their conversation, the Major closed the subject, and glided into a general exposition of the extent to which he had been beloved and doted on by splendid women and brilliant creatures.

On the next day but one, Mr. Dombey and the Major encountered the honourable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter in the Pump-room; on the day after, they met them again very near the place where they had met them first. After meeting them thus, three or four times in all, it became a point of mere civility to old acquaintances that the Major should go there one evening. Mr. Dombey had not originally intended to pay visits, but on the

Major announcing this intention, he said he would have the pleasure of accompanying him. So the Major told the Native to go round before dinner, and say, with his and Mr. Dombey's compliments, that they would have the honour of visiting the ladies that same evening, if the ladies were alone. In answer to which message, the Native brought back a very small note with a very large quantity of scent about it, indited by the Honourable Mrs. Skewton to Major Bagstock, and briefly saying, "You are a shocking bear and I have a great mind not to forgive you, but if you are very good indeed," which was underlined, "you may come. Compliments (in which Edith unites) to Mr. Dombey."

The Honourable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter, Mrs. Gran-ger, resided while at Leamington, in lodgings that were fashionable enough and dear enough, but rather limited in point of space and conveniences; so that the Honourable Mrs. Skewton, being in bed, had her feet in the window and her head in the fireplace, while the Honourable Mrs. Skewton's maid was quartered in a closet within the drawing-room, so extremely small, that, to avoid developing the whole of its accommodations, she was obliged to writhe in and out of the door like a beautiful serpent. Withers, the wan page, slept out of the house immediately under the tiles at a neighbouring milk-shop; and the wheeled chair, which was the stone of that young Sisyphus, passed the night in a shed belonging to the same dairy, where new-laid eggs were produced by the poultry connected with the establishment, who roosted on a broken donkey-cart, persuaded, to all appearance, that it grew there, and was a species of tree.

Mr. Dombey and the Major found Mrs. Skewton arranged, as Cleopatra, among the cushions of a sofa: very airily dressed: and certainly not resembling Shakspeare's Cleopatra, whom age could not wither. On their way up stairs they had heard the sound of a harp, but it had ceased on their being announced, and Edith now stood beside it handsomer and haughtier than ever.

It was a remarkable characteristic of this lady's beauty that it appeared to vaunt and assert itself without her aid, and against her will. She knew that she was beautiful: it was impossible that it could be otherwise. but she seemed with her own pride to defy her very self.

Whether she held cheap, attractions that could only call forth admiration that was worthless to her, or whether she designed to render them more precious to admirers by this usage of them, those to whom they *were* precious seldom paused to consider.

"I hope, Mrs. Granger," said Mr. Dombey, advancing a step towards her, "we are not the cause of your ceasing to play?"

"*You?* oh no!"

"Why do you not go on, then, my dearest Edith?" said Cleopatra.

"I left off as I began — of my own fancy."

The exquisite indifference of her manner in saying this: an indifference quite removed from dullness or insensibility, for it was pointed with proud purpose: was well set off by the carelessness with which she drew her hand across the strings, and came from that part of the room.

"Do you know, Mr. Dombey," said her languishing mother, playing with a hand-screen, "that occasionally my dearest Edith and myself actually almost differ —"

"Not quite, sometimes, Mama?" said Edith.

"Oh never quite, my darling! Fie, fie, it would break my heart," returned her mother, making a faint attempt to pat her with the screen, which Edith made no movement to meet, "— about these cold conventionalities of manner that are observed in little things? Why are we not more natural! Dear me! With all those yearnings, and gushings, and impulsive throb-bings that we have implanted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?"

Mr. Dombey said it was very true, very true.

"We could be more natural I suppose if we tried?" said Mrs. Skewton.

Mr. Dombey thought it possible.

"Devil a bit, Ma'am," said the Major. "We couldn't afford it. Unless the world was peopled with J. B.'s — tough and blunt old Joes, Ma'am, plain red herrings with hard roes, Sir — we couldn't afford it. It wouldn't do."

"You naughty Infidel," said Mrs. Skewton, "be mute."

"Cleopatra commands," returned the Major, kissing his hand, "and Antony Bagstock obeys."

"The man has no sensitiveness," said Mrs. Skewton, cruelly holding up the hand-screen so as to shut the Major out. "No sympathy. And what do we live for *but* sympathy! What else is so extremely charming! Without that gleam of sunshine on our cold, cold earth," said Mrs. Skewton, arranging her lace tucker, and complacently observing the effect of her bare lean arm, looking upward from the wrist, "how could we possibly bear it? In short, obdurate man!" glancing at the Major, round the screen, "I would have my world all heart; and Faith is so excessively charming, that I won't allow you to disturb it, do you hear?"

The Major replied that it was hard in Cleopatra to require the world to be all heart, and yet to appropriate to herself the hearts of all the world; which obliged Cleopatra to remind him that flattery was insupportable to her, and that if he had the boldness to address her in that strain any more, she would positively send him home.

Withers the Wan, at this period, handing round the tea, Mr. Dombey again addressed himself to Edith.

"There is not much company here, it would seem?" said Mr. Dombey, in his own portentous gentlemanly way.

"I believe not. We see none."

“Why really,” observed Mrs. Skewton from her couch, “there are no people here just now with whom we care to associate.”

“They have not enough heart,” said Edith, with a smile. The very twilight of a smile: so singularly were its light and darkness blended.

“My dearest Edith rallies me, you see!” said her mother shaking her head: which shook a little of itself sometimes, as if the palsy twinkled now and then in opposition to the diamonds. “Wicked one!”

“You have been here before, if I am not mistaken?” said Mr. Dombey. Still to Edith.

“Oh, several times. I think we have been everywhere.”

“A beautiful country!”

“I suppose it is. Everybody says so.”

“Your cousin Feenix raves about it, Edith,” interposed her mother from her couch.

The daughter slightly turned her graceful head, and raising her eyebrows by a hair’s-breadth as if her cousin Feenix were of all the mortal world the least to be regarded, turned her eyes again towards Mr. Dombey.

“I hope, for the credit of my good taste, that I am tired of the neighbourhood,” she said.

“You have almost reason to be, Madam,” he replied, glancing at a variety of landscape drawings, of which he had already recognised several as representing neighbouring points of view, and which were strewn abundantly about the room, “if these beautiful productions are from your hand.”

She gave him no reply, but sat in a disdainful beauty, quite amazing.

“Have they that interest?” said Mr. Dombey. “Are they yours?”

“Yes.”

“And you play, I already know.”

“Yes.”

“And sing?”

“Yes.”

She answered all these questions with a strange reluctance; and with that remarkable air of opposition to herself, already noticed as belonging to her beauty. Yet she was not embarrassed, but wholly self-possessed. Neither did she seem to wish to avoid the conversation, for she addressed her face, and — so far as she could — her manner also, to him; and continued to do so, when he was silent.

“You have many resources against weariness at least,” said Mr. Dombey.

“Whatever their efficiency may be,” she returned, “you know them all now. I have no more.”

“May I hope to prove them all?” said Mr. Dombey, with solemn gallantry, laying down a drawing he had held, and motioning towards the harp.

“Oh certainly! If you desire it!”

She rose as she spoke, and crossing by her mother’s couch, and directing a stately look towards her, which was instantaneous in its duration, but inclusive (if any one had seen it) of a multitude of expressions, among which that of the twilight smile, without the smile itself, overshadowed all the rest, went out of the room.

The Major, who was quite forgiven by this time, had wheeled a little table up to Cleopatra, and was sitting down to play picquet with her. Mr. Dombey, not knowing the game, sat down to watch them for his edification until Edith should return.

“We are going to have some music, Mr. Dombey, I hope?” said Cleopatra.

“Mrs. Granger has been kind enough to promise so,” said Mr. Dombey.

“Ah! That’s very nice. Do you propose, Major?”

"No Ma'am," said the Major. "Couldn't do it."

"You're a barbarous being," replied the lady, "and my hand's destroyed. You are fond of music, Mr. Dombey?"

"Eminently so," was Mr. Dombey's answer.

"Yes. It's very nice," said Cleopatra looking at her cards. "So much heart in it — undeveloped recollections of a previous state of existence — and all that — which is so truly charming. Do you know," simpered Cleopatra, reversing the knave of clubs, who had come into her game with his heels uppermost, "that if anything could tempt me to put a period to my life, it would be curiosity to find out what it's all about, and what it means; there are so many provoking mysteries, really, that are hidden from us. Major, you are to play!"

The Major played; and Mr. Dombey, looking on for his instruction, would soon have been in a state of dire confusion, but that he gave no attention to the game whatever, and sat wondering instead when Edith would come back.

She came at last, and sat down to her harp, and Mr. Dombey rose and stood beside her, listening. He had little taste for music, and no knowledge of the strain she played, but he saw her bending over it, and perhaps he heard among the sounding strings some distant music of his own, that tamed the monster of the iron road, and made it less inexorable.

Cleopatra had a sharp eye, verily, at picquet. It glistened like a bird's, and did not fix itself upon the game, but pierced the room from end to end, and gleamed on harp, performer, listener, everything.

When the haughty beauty had concluded, she arose, and receiving Mr. Dombey's thanks and compliments in exactly the same manner as before, went with scarcely any pause, to the piano, and began there.

Edith Granger, any song but that! Edith Granger, you are very handsome, and your touch upon the keys is brilliant, and

your voice is deep and rich; but not the air that his neglected daughter sang to his dead son!

Alas he knows it not; and if he did, what air of hers would stir him, rigid man! Sleep, lonely Florence, sleep! Peace in thy dreams, although the night has turned dark, and the clouds are gathering, and threaten to discharge themselves in hail!

CHAPTER II.

A trifle of management by Mr. Carker the Manager.

MR. CARKER the Manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the House. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr. Carker the Manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged — pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips — dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns — would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr. Carker the Manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play, warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand.

The letters were in various languages, but Mr. Carker the Manager read them all. If there had been anything in the offices of Dombey and Son that he could *not* read, there would have been

a card wanting in the pack. He read almost at a glance, and made combinations of one letter with another and one business with another as he went on, adding new matter to the heaps — much as a man would know the cards at sight, and work out their combinations in his mind after they were turned. Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr. Carker the Manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone.

And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr. Carker the Manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr. Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.

At length the letters were disposed of, excepting one which he reserved for a particular audience. Having locked the more confidential correspondence in a drawer, Mr. Carker the Manager rang his bell.

“Why do *you* answer it?” was his reception of his brother.

“The messenger is out, and I am the next,” was the submissive reply.

“You are the next!” muttered the Manager. “Yes! Creditable to me! There!”

Pointing to the heaps of opened letters, he turned disdainfully

away, in his elbow-chair, and broke the seal of that one which he held in his hand.

"I am sorry to trouble you, James," said the brother, gathering them up, "but —"

"Oh! You have something to say. I knew that. Well?"

Mr. Carker the Manager did not raise his eyes or turn them on his brother, but kept them on his letter, though without opening it.

"Well?" he repeated sharply.

"I am uneasy about Harriet."

"Harriet who? what Harriet? I know nobody of that name."

"She is not well, and has changed very much of late."

"She changed very much, a great many years ago," replied the Manager; "and that is all I have to say."

"I think if you would hear me —"

"Why should I hear you, Brother John?" returned the Manager, laying a sarcastic emphasis on those two words, and throwing up his head, but not lifting his eyes. "I tell you, Harriet Carker made her choice many years ago between her two brothers. She may repent it, but she must abide by it."

"Don't mistake me. I do not say she *does* repent it. It would be black ingratitude in me to hint at such a thing," returned the other. "Though believe me, James, I am as sorry for her sacrifice as you."

"As I?" exclaimed the Manager. "As I?"

"As sorry for her choice — for what you call her choice — as you are angry at it," said the Junior.

"Angry?" repeated the other, with a wide show of his teeth.

"Displeased. Whatever word you like best. You know my meaning. There is no offence in my intention."

"There is offence in everything you do," replied his brother, glancing at him with a sudden scowl, which in a moment gave

place to a wider smile than the last. "Carry those papers away, if you please. I am busy."

His politeness was so much more cutting than his wrath, that the Junior went to the door. But stopping at it, and looking round, he said:

"When Harriet tried in vain to plead for me with you, on your first just indignation, and my first disgrace; and when she left you, James, to follow my broken fortunes, and devote herself, in her mistaken affection, to a ruined brother, because without her he had no one, and was lost; she was young and pretty. I think if you could see her now — if you would go and see her — she would move your admiration and compassion."

The Manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, as who should say, in answer to some careless small-talk, "Dear me! Is that the case?" but said never a word.

"We thought in those days: you and I both: that she would marry young, and lead a happy and light-hearted life," pursued the other. "Oh if you knew how cheerfully she cast those hopes away; how cheerfully she has gone forward on the path she took, and never once looked back; you never could say again that her name was strange in your ears. Never!"

Again the Manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, and seemed to say, "Remarkable indeed! You quite surprise me!" And again he uttered never a word.

"May I go on?" said John Carker, mildly.

"On your way?" replied his smiling brother. "If you will have the goodness."

John Carker, with a sigh, was passing slowly out at the door, when his brother's voice detained him for a moment on the threshold.

"If she has gone, and goes, her own way cheerfully," he said, throwing the still unfolded letter on his desk, and putting his hands firmly in his pockets, "you may tell her that I go as

cheerfully on mine. If she has never once looked back, you may tell her that I have, sometimes, to recall her taking part with you, and that my resolution is no easier to wear away;" he smiled very sweetly here; "than marble."

"I tell her nothing of you. We never speak about you. Once a year, on your birthday, Harriet says always, 'Let us remember James by name, and wish him happy,' but we say no more."

"Tell it then, if you please," returned the other, "to yourself. You can't repeat it too often, as a lesson to you to avoid the subject in speaking to me. I know no Harriet Carker. There is no such person. *You* may have a sister; make much of her. I have none."

Mr. Carker the Manager took up the letter again, and waved it with a smile of mock courtesy towards the door. Unfolding it as his brother withdrew, and looking darkly after him as he left the room, he once more turned round in his elbow-chair, and applied himself to a diligent perusal of its contents.

It was in the writing of his great chief, Mr. Dombey, and dated from Leamington. Though he was a quick reader of all other letters, Mr. Carker read this slowly: weighing the words as he went, and bringing every tooth in his head to bear upon them. When he had read it through once, he turned it over again, and picked out these passages. 'I find myself benefited by the change, and am not yet inclined to name any time for my return.' 'I wish, Carker, you would arrange to come down once and see me here, and let me know how things are going on, in person.' 'I omitted to speak to you about young Gay. If not gone per Son and Heir, or if Son and Heir still lying in the Docks, appoint some other young man and keep him in the city for the present. I am not decided.' "Now that's unfortunate!" said Mr. Carker the Manager, expanding his mouth, as if it were made of India Rubber: "for he's far away!"

Still that passage, which was in a postscript, attracted his attention and his teeth, once more.

“I think,” he said, “my good friend Captain Cuttle mentioned something about being towed along in the wake of that day. What a pity he’s so far away!”

He refolded the letter, and was sitting trifling with it, standing it longwise and broad-wise on his table, and turning it over and over on all sides — doing pretty much the same thing perhaps, by its contents — when Mr. Perch the messenger knocked softly at the door, and coming in on tiptoe, bending his body at every step as if it were the delight of his life to bow, laid some papers on the table.

“Would you please to be engaged Sir?” asked Mr. Perch, rubbing his hands, and deferentially putting his head on one side, like a man who felt he had no business to hold it up in such a presence, and would keep it as much out of the way as possible.

“Who wants me?”

“Why Sir,” said Mr. Perch, in a soft voice, “really nobody, Sir, to speak of at present. Mr. Gills the Ship’s Instrument-maker Sir, has looked in, about a little matter of payment, he says; but I mentioned to him, Sir, that you was engaged several deep; several deep.”

Mr. Perch coughed once behind his hand, and waited for further orders.

“Anybody else?”

“Well Sir,” said Mr. Perch, “I wouldn’t of my own self take the liberty of mentioning, Sir, that there was anybody else; but that same young lad that was here yesterday Sir, and last week, has been hanging about the place; and it looks Sir,” added Mr. Perch, stopping to shut the door, “dreadful unbusiness-like to see him whistling to the sparrows down the court, and making of ’em answer him.”

"You said he wanted something to do, didn't you Perch?" asked Mr. Carker, leaning back in his chair and looking at that officer.

"Why Sir," said Mr. Perch, coughing behind his hand again, "his expression certainly were that he was in wants of a sitiuation, and that he considered something might be done for him about the Docks, being used to fishing with a rod and line: but —" Mr. Perch shook his head very dubiously indeed.

"What does he say when he comes?" asked Mr. Carker.

"Indeed Sir," said Mr. Perch, coughing another cough behind his hand, which was always his resource as an expression of humility when nothing else occurred to him, "his observation generally air that he would humbly wish to see one of the gentlemen, and that he wants to earn a living. But you see, Sir," added Perch, dropping his voice to a whisper, and turning, in the inviolable nature of his confidence, to give the door a thrust with his hand and knee, as if that would shut it any more when it was shut already, "it's hardly to be bore Sir that a common lad like that should come a prowling here, and saying that his mother nursed our House's young gentleman, and that he hopes our House will give him a chance on that account. I am sure Sir," observed Mr. Perch, "that although Mrs. Perch was at that time nursing as thriving a little girl Sir as we've ever took the liberty of adding to our family, I wouldn't have made so free as drop a hint of her being capable of imparting nourishment, not if it was ever so!"

Mr. Carker grinned at him like a shark, but in an absent thoughtful manner.

"Whether," submitted Mr. Perch, after a short silence, and another cough, "it mightn't be best for me to tell him, that if he was seen here any more he would be given into custody; and to keep to it! With respect to bodily fear," said Mr. Perch, "I'm so timid, myself, by nature Sir, and my nerves is so un-

strung by Mrs. Perch's state, that I could take my affidavit easy."

"Let me see this fellow, Perch," said Mr. Carker. "Bring him in!"

"Yes Sir. Begging your pardon Sir," said Mr. Perch, hesitating at the door, "he's rough Sir, in appearance."

"Never mind. If he's there, bring him in. I'll see Mr. Gills directly. Ask him to wait!"

Mr. Perch bowed; and shutting the door as precisely and carefully as if he were not coming back for a week, went on his quest among the sparrows in the court. While he was gone, Mr. Carker assumed his favourite attitude before the fire-place, and stood looking at the door; presenting, with his under lip tucked into the smile that showed his whole row of upper teeth, a singularly crouching appearance.

The messenger was not long in returning, followed by a pair of heavy boots that came bumping along the passage like boxes. With the unceremonious words "Come along with you!" — a very unusual form of introduction from his lips — Mr. Perch then ushered into the presence a strong-built lad of fifteen, with a round red face, a round sleek head, round black eyes, round limbs, and round body, who, to carry out the general rotundity of his appearance, had a round hat in his hand, without a particle of brim to it.

Obedient to a nod from Mr. Carker, Perch had no sooner confronted the visitor with that gentleman than he withdrew. The moment they were face to face alone, Mr. Carker, without a word of preparation, took him by the throat, and shook him until his head seemed loose upon his shoulders.

The boy, who in the midst of his astonishment could not help staring wildly at the gentleman with so many white teeth who was choking him, and at the office walls, as though determined, if he *were* choked, that his last look should be at the mysteries for

his intrusion into which he was paying such a severe penalty, at last contrived to utter —

“Come Sir! You let me alone, will you!”

“Let you alone!” said Mr. Carker. “What! I have got you, have I?” There was no doubt of that, and tightly too. “You dog,” said Mr. Carker, through his set jaws, “I ’ll strangle you!”

Biler whimpered, would he though? oh no he wouldn't — and what was he doing of — and why didn't he strangle somebody of his own size and not *him*: but Biler was quelled by the extraordinary nature of his reception, and, as his head became stationary, and he looked the gentleman in the face, or rather in the teeth, and saw him snarling at him, he so far forgot his manhood as to cry.

“I haven't done nothing to you Sir,” said Biler, otherwise Rob, otherwise Grinder, and always Toodle.

“You young scoundrel!” replied Mr. Carker, slowly releasing him, and moving back a step into his favourite position. “What do you mean by daring to come here?”

“I didn't mean no harm Sir,” whimpered Rob, putting one hand to his throat, and the knuckles of the other to his eyes. “I ’ll never come again Sir. I only wanted work.”

“Work, young Cain that you are!” repeated Mr. Carker, eyeing him narrowly. “An't you the idlest vagabond in London?”

The impeachment, while it much affected Mr. Toodle Junior, attached to his character so justly, that he could not say a word in denial. He stood looking at the gentleman, therefore, with a frightened, self-convicted, and remorseful air. As to his looking at him, it may be observed that he was fascinated by Mr. Carker and never took his round eyes off him for an instant.

“An't you a thief?” said Mr. Carker, with his hands behind him in his pockets.

"No Sir," pleaded Rob.

"You are!" said Mr. Carker.

"I an't indeed Sir," whimpered Rob. "I never did such a thing as thief Sir, if you 'll believe me. I know I 've been a going wrong Sir, ever since I took to bird-catching and walking-matching. I 'm sure a cove might think," said Mr. Toodle Junior, with a burst of penitence, "that singing birds was innocent company, but nobody knows what harm is in them little creeturs and what they brings you down to."

They seemed to have brought *him* down to a velveteen jacket and trousers very much the worse for wear, a particularly small red waistcoat like a gorget, an interval of blue check, and the hat before mentioned.

"I an't been home twenty times since them birds got their will of me," said Rob, "and that 's ten months. How can I go home when everybody 's miserable to see me! I wonder," said Biler, blubbering outright, and smearing his eyes with his coat-cuff, "that I haven't been and drowned myself over and over again."

All of which, including his expression of surprise at not having achieved this last scarce performance, the boy said, just as if the teeth of Mr. Carker drew it out of him, and he had no power of concealing anything with that battery of attraction in full play.

"You 're a nice young gentleman!" said Mr. Carker, shaking his head at him. "There 's hemp-seed sown for *you*, my fine fellow!"

"I 'm sure Sir," returned the wretched Biler, blubbering again, and again having recourse to his coat cuff: "I shouldn't care, sometimes, if it was growed too. My misfortunes all begun in wagging, Sir; but what could I do, exceptin' wag?"

"Excepting what?" said Mr. Carker.

"Wag, Sir. Wagging from school."

“Do you mean pretending to go there, and not going?” said Mr. Carker.

“Yes, Sir, that ’s wagging, Sir,” returned the quondam Grinder, much affected. “I was chivied through the streets, Sir, when I went there, and pounded when I got there. So I wagged, and hid myself, and that began it.”

“And you mean to tell me,” said Mr. Carker, taking him by the throat again, holding him out at arm’s-length, and surveying him in silence for some moments, “that you want a place, do you?”

“I should be thankful to be tried, Sir,” returned Toodle Junior, faintly.

Mr. Carker the Manager pushed him backward into a corner — the boy submitting quietly, hardly venturing to breathe, and never once removing his eyes from his face — and rang the bell.

“Tell Mr. Gills to come here.”

Mr. Perch was too deferential to express surprise or recognition of the figure in the corner: and Uncle Sol appeared immediately.

“Mr. Gills!” said Carker, with a smile, “sit down. How do you do? You continue to enjoy your health, I hope?”

“Thank you, Sir,” returned Uncle Sol, taking out his pocket-book, and handing over some notes as he spoke. “Nothing ails me in body but old age. Twenty-five, Sir.”

“You are as punctual and exact, Mr. Gills,” replied the smiling Manager, taking a paper from one of his many drawers, and making an endorsement on it, while Uncle Sol looked over him, “as one of your own chronometers. Quite right.”

“The Son and Heir has not been spoken, I find by the list, Sir,” said Uncle Sol, with a slight addition to the usual tremor in his voice.

“The Son and Heir has not been spoken,” returned Carker.

“There seems to have been tempestuous weather, Mr. Gills, and she has probably been driven out of her course.”

“She is safe, I trust in Heaven!” said old Sol.

“She is safe, I trust in Heaven!” assented Mr. Carker in that voiceless manner of his: which made the observant young Toodle tremble again. “Mr. Gills,” he added aloud, throwing himself back in his chair, “you must miss your nephew very much?”

Uncle Sol, standing by him, shook his head and heaved a deep sigh.

“Mr. Gills,” said Carker, with his soft hand playing round his mouth, and looking up into the Instrument-maker’s face, “it would be company to you to have a young fellow in your shop just now, and it would be obliging me if you would give one house-room for the present. No, to be sure,” he added quickly, in anticipation of what the old man was going to say, “there’s not much business doing there, I know; but you can make him clean the place out, polish up the instruments; drudge, Mr. Gills. That’s the lad!”

Sol Gills pulled down his spectacles from his forehead to his eyes, and looked at Toodle Junior standing upright in the corner: his head presenting the appearance (which it always did) of having been newly drawn out of a bucket of cold water; his small waistcoat rising and falling quickly in the play of his emotions; and his eyes intently fixed on Mr. Carker, without the least reference to his proposed master.

“Will you give him house-room, Mr. Gills?” said the Manager.

Old Sol, without being quite enthusiastic on the subject, replied that he was glad of any opportunity, however slight, to oblige Mr. Carker, whose wish on such a point was a command: and that the Wooden Midshipman would consider himself happy to receive in his berth any visitor of Mr. Carker’s selecting.

Mr. Carker bared himself to the tops and bottoms of his gums:

making the watchful Toodle Junior tremble more and more: and acknowledged the Instrument-maker's politeness in his most affable manner.

"I 'll dispose of him so, then, Mr. Gills," he answered, rising, and shaking the old man by the hand, "until I make up my mind what to do with him, and what he deserves. As I consider myself responsible for him, Mr. Gills," here he smiled a wide smile at Rob, who shook before it: "I shall be glad if you 'll look sharply after him, and report his behaviour to me. I 'll ask a question or two of his parents as I ride home this afternoon — respectable people — to confirm some particulars in his own account of himself; and that done, Mr. Gills, I 'll send him round to you to-morrow morning. Good b'ye!"

His smile at parting was so full of teeth, that it confused old Sol, and made him vaguely uncomfortable. He went home, thinking of raging seas, foundering ships, drowning men, an ancient bottle of Madeira never brought to light, and other dismal matter.

"Now, boy!" said Mr. Carker, putting his hand on young Toodle's shoulder, and bringing him out into the middle of the room. "You have heard me?"

Rob said "Yes, Sir."

"Perhaps you understand," pursued his patron, "that if you ever deceive or play tricks with me, you had better have drowned yourself, indeed, once for all, before you came here?"

There was nothing in any branch of mental acquisition that Rob seemed to understand better than that.

"If you have lied to me," said Mr. Carker, "in anything, never come in my way again. If not, you may let me find you waiting for me somewhere near your mother's house this afternoon. I shall leave this at five o'clock, and ride there on horse-back. Now, give me the address."

Rob repeated it slowly, as Mr. Carker wrote it down. Rob

even spelt it over a second time, letter by letter, as if he thought that the omission of a dot or scratch would lead to his destruction. Mr. Carker then handed him out of the room: and Rob, keeping his round eyes fixed upon his patron to the last, vanished for the time being.

Mr. Carker the Manager did a great deal of business in the course of the day, and bestowed his teeth upon a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on 'Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o'clock arriving, and with it Mr. Carker's bay horse, they got on horseback, and went gleaming up Cheapside.

As no one can easily ride fast, even if inclined to do so, through the press and throng of the city at that hour, and as Mr. Carker was not inclined, he went leisurely along, picking his way among the carts and carriages, avoiding whenever he could the wetter and more dirty places in the over-watered road, and taking infinite pains to keep himself and his steed clean. Glancing at the passers-by while he was thus ambling on his way, he suddenly encountered the round eyes of the sleek-headed Rob intently fixed upon his face as if they had never been taken off, while the boy himself, with a pocket-handkerchief twisted up like a speckled eel and girded round his waist, made a very conspicuous demonstration of being prepared to attend upon him, at whatever pace he might think proper to go.

This attention, however flattering, being one of an unusual kind, and attracting some notice from the other passengers, Mr. Carker took advantage of a clearer thoroughfare and a cleaner road, and broke into a trot. Rob immediately did the same. Mr. Carker presently tried a canter; Rob was still in attendance. Then a short gallop; it was all one to the boy. Whenever Mr. Carker turned his eyes to that side of the road, he still saw Toodle Junior holding his course, apparently without distress, and working himself along by the elbows after the most approved

manner of professional gentlemen who get over the ground for wagers.

Ridiculous as this attendance was, it was a sign of an influence established over the boy, and therefore Mr. Carker, affecting not to notice it, rode away into the neighbourhood of Mr. Toodle's house. On his slackening his pace here, Rob appeared before him to point out the turnings; and when he called to a man at a neighbouring gateway to hold his horse, pending his visit to the Buildings that had succeeded Staggs's Gardens, Rob dutifully held the stirrup, while the Manager dismounted.

"Now, Sir," said Mr. Carker, taking him by the shoulder, "come along!"

The prodigal son was evidently nervous of visiting the parental abode; but Mr. Carker pushing him on before, he had nothing for it but to open the right door, and suffer himself to be walked into the midst of his brothers and sisters, mustered in overwhelming force round the family tea-table. At sight of the prodigal in the grasp of a stranger, these tender relations united in a general howl, which smote upon the prodigal's breast so sharply when he saw his mother stand up among them, pale and trembling with the baby in her arms, that he lent his own voice to the chorus.

Nothing doubting now that the stranger, if not Mr. Ketch in person, was one of that company, the whole of the young family wailed the louder, while its more infantine members, unable to control the transports of emotion appertaining to their time of life, threw themselves on their backs like young birds when terrified by a hawk, and kicked violently. At length, poor Polly making herself audible, said, with quivering lips, "Oh Rob, my poor boy, what have you done at last!"

"Nothing mother," cried Rob, in a piteous voice, "ask the gentleman!"

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Carker, "I want to do him good."

At this announcement, Polly, who had not cried yet, began to do so. The elder Toodles, who appeared to have been meditating a rescue, unclenched their fists. The younger Toodles clustered round their mother's gown, and peeped from under their own chubby arms at their desperado brother and his unknown friend. Everybody blessed the gentleman with the beautiful teeth, who wanted to do good.

"This fellow," said Mr. Carker to Polly, giving him a gentle shake, "is your son, eh Ma'am?"

"Yes Sir," sobbed Polly, with a curtsey; "yes Sir."

"A bad son, I am afraid?" said Mr. Carker.

"Never a bad son to me Sir," returned Polly.

"To whom then?" demanded Mr. Carker.

"He has been a little wild Sir," replied Polly, checking the baby, who was making convulsive efforts with his arms and legs to launch himself on Biler, through the ambient air, "and has gone with wrong companions; but I hope he has seen the misery of that Sir, and will do well again."

Mr. Carker looked at Polly, and the clean room, and the clean children, and the simple Toodle face, combined of father and mother, that was reflected and repeated everywhere about him: and seemed to have achieved the real purpose of his visit.

"Your husband, I take it, is not at home?" he said.

"No Sir," replied Polly. "He's down the line at present."

The prodigal Rob, seemed very much relieved to hear it: though, still in the absorption of all his faculties in his patron, he hardly took his eyes from Mr. Carker's face, unless for a moment at a time to steal a sorrowful glance at his mother.

"Then," said Mr. Carker, "I'll tell you how I have stumbled on this boy of yours, and who I am, and what I am going to do for him."

This Mr. Carker did, in his own way: saying that he at first intended to have accumulated nameless terrors on his presumptuous head, for coming to the whereabouts of Dombey and Son. That he had relented, in consideration of his youth, his professed contrition, and his friends. That he was afraid he took a rash step in doing anything for the boy, and one that might expose him to the censure of the prudent; but that he did it of himself and for himself, and risked the consequences single-handed; and that his mother's past connection with Mr. Dombey's family had nothing to do with it, and that Mr. Dombey had nothing to do with it, but that he, Mr. Carker, was the be-all, and the end-all of this business. Taking great credit to himself for his goodness, and receiving no less from all the family then present, Mr. Carker signified, indirectly but still pretty plainly, that Rob's implicit fidelity, attachment, and devotion, were for evermore his due, and the least homage he could receive. And with this great truth Rob himself was so impressed, that, standing gazing on his patron with tears rolling down his cheeks, he nodded his shiny head until it seemed almost as loose as it had done under the same patron's hands that morning.

Polly, who had passed Heaven knows how many sleepless nights on account of this her dissipated firstborn, and had not seen him for weeks and weeks, could have almost kneeled to Mr. Carker the Manager, as to a Good Spirit — in spite of his teeth. But Mr. Carker rising to depart, she only thanked him with her mother's prayers and blessings; thanks so rich when paid out of the Heart's mint, especially for any service Mr. Carker had rendered, that he might have given back a large amount of change, and yet been overpaid.

As that gentleman made his way among the crowding children to the door, Rob retreated on his mother, and took her and the baby in the same repentant hug.

"I'll try hard, dear mother, now. Upon my soul I will!" said Rob.

"Oh do, my dear boy! I am sure you will, for our sakes and your own!" cried Polly, kissing him. "But you're coming back to speak to me, when you have seen the gentleman away?"

"I don't know, mother." Rob hesitated, and looked down.

"Father — when's he coming home?"

"Not till two o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I'll come back, mother dear!" cried Rob. And passing through the shrill cry of his brothers and sisters in reception of this promise, he followed Mr. Carker out.

"What!" said Mr. Carker, who had heard this. "You have a bad father, have you?"

"No Sir!" returned Rob, amazed. "There ain't a better nor a kinder father going, than mine is."

"Why don't you want to see him then?" inquired his patron.

"There's such a difference between a father and a mother Sir," said Rob, after faltering for a moment. "He couldn't hardly believe yet that I was going to do better — though I know he'd try to — but a mother — *she* always believes what's good, Sir; at least I know my mother does, God bless her!"

Mr. Carker's mouth expanded, but he said no more until he was mounted on his horse, and had dismissed the man who held it, when, looking down from the saddle steadily into the attentive and watchful face of the boy, he said:

"You'll come to me to-morrow morning, and you shall be shown where that old gentleman lives; that old gentleman who was with me this morning; where you are going, as you heard me say."

"Yes Sir," returned Rob.

"I have a great interest in that old gentleman, and in serving him, you serve me, boy, do you understand? Well," he added, interrupting him, for he saw his round face brighten

when he was told that: "I see you do. I want to know all about that old gentleman, and how he goes on from day to day — for I am anxious to be of service to him — and especially who comes there to see him. Do you understand?"

Rob nodded his stedfast face, and said, "Yes Sir," again.

"I should like to know that he has friends who are attentive to him, and that they don't desert him — for he lives very much alone now, poor fellow; but that they are fond of him, and of his nephew who has gone abroad. There is a very young lady who may perhaps come to see him. I want particular to know all about *her*."

"I'll take care Sir," said the boy.

"And take care," returned his patron, bending forward to advance his grinning face closer to the boy's, and pat him on the shoulder with the handle of his whip: "take care you talk about affairs of mine to nobody but me."

"To nobody in the world Sir," replied Rob, shaking his head.

"Neither there," said Mr. Carker, pointing to the place they had just left, "nor anywhere else. I'll try how true and grateful you can be. I'll prove you!" Making this, by his display of teeth and by the action of his head, as much a threat as a promise, he turned from Rob's eyes, which were nailed upon him as if he had won the boy by a charm, body and soul, and rode away. But again becoming conscious, after trotting a short distance, that his devoted henchman, girt as before, was yielding him the same attendance, to the great amusement of sundry spectators, he reined up, and ordered him off. To insure his obedience, he turned in the saddle and watched him as he retired. It was curious to see that even then Rob could not keep his eyes wholly averted from his patron's face, but, constantly turning and turning again to look after him, involved himself in a tempest of buffetings and jostlings from the other

passengers in the street: of which, in the pursuit of the one paramount idea, he was perfectly heedless.

Mr. Carker the Manager rode on at a foot pace, with the easy air of one who had performed all the business of the day in a satisfactory manner, and got it comfortably off his mind. Complacent and affable as man could be, Mr. Carker picked his way along the streets and hummed a soft tune as he went. He seemed to purr: he was so glad.

And in some sort, Mr. Carker, in his fancy, basked upon a hearth too. Coiled up snugly at certain feet, he was ready for a spring, or for a tear, or for a scratch, or for a velvet touch, as the humour took him and occasion served. Was there any bird in a cage, that came in for a share of his regards?

"A very young lady!" thought Mr. Carker the Manager, through his song. "Aye! when I saw her last, she was a little child. With dark eyes and hair, I recollect, and a good face; a very good face! I dare say she's pretty."

More affable and pleasant yet, and humming his song until his many teeth vibrated to it, Mr. Carker picked his way along, and turned at last into the shady street where Mr. Dombey's house stood. He had been so busy, winding webs round good faces, and obscuring them with meshes, that he hardly thought of being at this point of his ride, until, glancing down the cold perspective of tall houses, he reined in his horse quickly within a few yards of the door. But to explain why Mr. Carker reined in his horse quickly, and what he looked at in no small surprise, a few digressive words are necessary.

Mr. Toots, emancipated from the Blimber thralldom and coming into the possession of a certain portion of his worldly wealth, "which," as he had been wont, during his last half-year's probation, to communicate to Mr. Feeder every evening as a new discovery, "the executors couldn't keep him out off," had applied himself, with great diligence, to the science of Life.

Fired with a noble emulation to pursue a brilliant and distinguished career, Mr. Toots had furnished a choice set of apartments; had established among them a sporting bower, embellished with the portraits of winning horses, in which he took no particle of interest; and a divan, which made him poorly. In this delicious abode, Mr. Toots devoted himself to the cultivation of those gentle arts which refine and humanise existence, his chief instructor in which was an interesting character called the Game Chicken, who was always to be heard of at the bar of the Black Badger, wore a shaggy white great-coat in the warmest weather, and knocked Mr. Toots about the head three times a week, for the small consideration of ten and six per visit.

The Game Chicken, who was quite the Apollo of Mr. Toots's Pantheon, had introduced to him a marker who taught billiards, a Life Guard who taught fencing, a job-master who taught riding, a Cornish gentleman who was up to anything in the athletic line, and two or three other friends connected no less intimately with the fine arts. Under whose auspices Mr. Toots could hardly fail to improve apace, and under whose tuition he went to work.

But however it came about, it came to pass, even while these gentlemen had the gloss of novelty upon them, that Mr. Toots felt, he didn't know how, unsettled and uneasy. There were husks in his corn, that even Game Chickens couldn't peck up; gloomy giants in his leisure, that even Game Chickens couldn't knock down. Nothing seemed to do Mr. Toots so much good as incessantly leaving cards at Mr. Dombey's door. No tax-gatherer in the British Dominions — that wide-spread territory on which the sun never sets, and where the tax-gatherer never goes to bed — was more regular and persevering in his calls than Mr. Toots.

Mr. Toots never went upstairs; and always performed the

same ceremonies, richly dressed for the purpose, at the hall door.

"Oh! Good morning!" would be Mr. Toots's first remark to the servant. "For Mr. Dombey," would be Mr. Toots's next remark, as he handed in a card. "For Miss Dombey," would be his next, as he handed in another.

Mr. Toots would then turn round as if to go away; but the man knew him by this time, and knew he wouldn't.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Mr. Toots would say, as if a thought had suddenly descended on him. "Is the young woman at home?"

The man would rather think she was, but wouldn't quite know. Then he would ring a bell that rang upstairs, and would look up the staircase, and would say, yes she *was* at home, and was coming down. Then Miss Nipper would appear, and the man would retire.

"Oh! How de do?" Mr. Toots would say, with a chuckle and a blush.

Susan would thank him, and say she was very well.

"How's Diogenes going on?" would be Mr. Toots's second interrogation.

Very well indeed. Miss Florence was fonder and fonder of him every day. Mr. Toots was sure to hail this with a burst of chuckles, like the opening of a bottle of some effervescent beverage.

"Miss Florence is quite well, Sir," Susan would add.

"Oh, it's of no consequence, thank'ee," was the invariable reply of Mr. Toots; and when he had said so, he always went away very fast.

Now it is certain that Mr. Toots had a filmy something in his mind, which led him to conclude that if he could aspire successfully, in the fulness of time, to the hand of Florence, he would be fortunate and blest. It is certain that Mr. Toots, by some remote

and roundabout road, had got to that point, and that there he made a stand. His heart was wounded; he was touched; he was in love. He had made a desperate attempt, one night, and had sat up all night for the purpose, to write an acrostic on Florence, which affected him to tears in the conception. But he never proceeded in the execution further than the words "For when I gaze," — the flow of imagination in which he had previously written down the initial letters of the other seven lines, deserting him at that point.

Beyond devising that very artful and politic measure of leaving a card for Mr. Dombey daily, the brain of Mr. Toots had not worked much in reference to the subject that held his feelings prisoner. But deep consideration at length assured Mr. Toots that an important step to gain, was, the conciliation of Miss Susan Nipper, preparatory to giving her some inkling of his state of mind.

A little light and playful gallantry towards this lady seemed the means to employ in that early chapter of the history, for winning her to his interests. Not being able quite to make up his mind about it, he consulted the Chicken — without taking that gentleman into his confidence; merely informing him that a friend in Yorkshire had written to him (Mr. Toots) for his opinion on such a question. The Chicken replying that his opinion always was, "Go in and win," and, further, "When your man's before you and your work cut out, go in and do it," Mr. Toots considered this a figurative way of supporting his own view of the case, and heroically resolved to kiss Miss Nipper next day.

Upon the next day, therefore, Mr. Toots, putting into requisition some of the greatest marvels that Burgess and Co. had ever turned out, went off to Mr. Dombey's upon this design. But his heart failed him so much as he approached the scene of

action, that, although he arrived on the ground at three o'clock in the afternoon, it was six before he knocked at the door.

Everything happened as usual, down to the point when Susan said her young mistress was well, and Mr. Toots said it was of no consequence. To her amazement, Mr. Toots, instead of going off, like a rocket, after that observation, lingered and chuckled.

"Perhaps you'd like to walk up stairs, Sir?" said Susan.

"Well, I think I will come in!" said Mr. Toots.

But instead of walking up stairs, the bold Toots made an awkward plunge at Susan when the door was shut, and embracing that fair creature, kissed her on the cheek.

"Go along with you!" cried Susan, "or I'll tear your eyes out."

"Just another!" said Mr. Toots.

"Go along with you!" exclaimed Susan, giving him a push. "Innocents like you, too! Who'll begin next! Go along, Sir!"

Susan was not in any serious strait, for she could hardly speak for laughing; but Diogenes, on the staircase, hearing a rustling against the wall, and a shuffling of feet, and seeing through the bannisters that there was some contention going on and foreign invasion in the house, formed a different opinion, dashed down to the rescue, and in the twinkling of an eye had Mr. Toots by the leg.

Susan screamed, laughed, opened the street-door, and ran down stairs; the bold Toots tumbled staggering out into the street, with Diogenes holding on to one leg of his pantaloons, as if Burgess and Co. were his cooks, and had provided that dainty morsel for his holiday entertainment; Diogenes shaken off, rolled over and over in the dust, got up again, whirled round the giddy Toots and snapped at him: and all this turmoil, Mr. Carker,

reining up his horse and sitting at a little distance, saw, to his amazement, issue from the stately house of Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Carker remained watching the discomfited Toots, when Diogenes was called in, and the door shut: and while that gentleman, taking refuge in a doorway near at hand, bound up the torn leg of his pantaloons with a costly silk handkerchief that had formed part of his expensive outfit for the adventure.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said Mr. Carker, riding up, with his most propitiatory smile. "I hope you are not hurt?"

"Oh no, thank you," replied Mr. Toots, raising his flushed face, "it's of no consequence." Mr. Toots would have signified, if he could, that he liked it very much.

"If the dog's teeth have entered the leg, Sir —" began Carker, with a display of his own.

"No, thank you," said Mr. Toots, "it's all quite right. It's very comfortable, thank you."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Dombey," observed Carker.

"Have you though?" rejoined the blushing Toots.

"And you will allow me, perhaps, to apologise, in his absence," said Mr. Carker, taking off his hat, "for such a misadventure, and to wonder how it can possibly have happened."

Mr. Toots is so much gratified by this politeness, and the lucky chance of making friends with a friend of Mr. Dombey, that he pulls out his card-case, which he never loses an opportunity of using, and hands his name and address to Mr. Carker: who responds to that courtesy by giving him his own, and with that they part.

As Mr. Carker picks his way so softly past the house, glancing up at the windows, and trying to make out the pensive face behind the curtain looking at the children opposite, the rough head of Diogenes comes clambering up close by it, and the dog, regardless of all soothing, barks and growls, and makes at him

from that height, as if he would spring down and tear him limb from limb.

Well spoken, Di, so near your mistress! Another, and another with your head up, your eyes flashing, and your vexed mouth worrying itself, for want of him! Another, as he picks his way along! You have a good scent, Di, — cats, boy, cats!

CHAPTER III.

Florence solitary, and the midshipman mysterious.

FLORENCE lived alone in the great dreary house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone; and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy, than was her father's mansion in its grim reality, as it stood lowering on the street: always by night, when lights were shining from neighbouring windows, a blot upon its scanty brightness; always by day, a frown upon its never-smiling face.

There were not two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this abode, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the wronged innocence imprisoned; but besides a glowering visage, with its thin lips parted wickedly, that surveyed all comers from above the archway of the door, there was a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron curling and twisting like a petrification of an arbour over the threshold, budding in spikes and corkscrew points, and bearing, one on either side, two ominous extinguishers, that seemed to say, "Who enter here, leave light behind!" There were no talismanic characters engraven on the portal, but the house was now so neglected in appearance, that boys chalked the railings and the pavement — particularly

round the corner where the side wall was — and drew ghosts on the stable door; and being sometimes driven off by Mr. Towlinson, made portraits of him, in return, with his ears growing out horizontally from under his hat. Noise ceased to be, within the shadow of the roof. The brass band that came into the street once a week, in the morning, never brayed a note in at those windows; but all such company, down to a poor little piping organ of weak intellect, with an imbecile party of automaton dancers, waltzing in and out at folding doors, fell off from it with one accord, and shunned it as a hopeless place.

The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired. The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrunk like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards, starting at unwonted foot-steps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how; spiders, moths, and grubs were heard of every day. An exploratory black-beetle now and then was found immovable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling.

The dreary magnificence of the state rooms, seen imperfectly by the doubtful light admitted through closed shutters, would have answered well enough for an enchanted abode. Such as the

tarnished paws of gilded lions, stealthily put out from beneath their wrappers; the marble lineaments of busts on pedestals, fearfully revealing themselves through veils; the clocks that never told the time, or, if wound up by any chance, told it wrong, and struck unearthly numbers, which are not upon the dial; the accidental tinklings among the pendant lustres, more startling than alarm-bells; the softened sounds and laggard air that made their way among these objects, and a phantom crowd of others, shrouded and hooded, and made spectral of shape. But, besides, there was the great staircase, where the lord of the place so rarely set his foot, and by which his little child had gone up to Heaven. There were other staircases and passages where no one went for weeks together; there were two closed rooms associated with dead members of the family, and with whispered recollections of them; and to all the house but Florence, there was a gentle figure moving through the solitude and gloom, that gave to every lifeless thing a touch of present human interest and wonder.

For Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the cold walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills. Fragments of mortar lost their hold upon the insides of the unused chimneys, and came dropping down. The two trees with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves. Through the whole building, white had turned yellow, yellow nearly black; and since the time when the poor lady died, it had slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street.

But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in

the story. Her books, her music, and her daily teachers, were her only real companions, Susan Nipper and Diogenes excepted: of whom the former, in her attendance on the studies of her young mistress, began to grow quite learned herself, while the latter, softened possibly by the same influences, would lay his head upon the window-ledge, and placidly open and shut his eyes upon the street, all through a summer morning; sometimes pricking up his head to look with great significance after some noisy dog in a cart, who was barking his way along, and sometimes, with an exasperated and unaccountable recollection of his supposed enemy in the neighbourhood, rushing to the door, whence, after a deafening disturbance, he would come jogging back with a ridiculous complacency that belonged to him, and lay his jaw upon the window-ledge again, with the air of a dog who had done a public service.

So Florence lived in her wilderness of a home, within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her. She could go down to her father's rooms now, and think of him, and suffer her loving heart humbly to approach him, without fear of repulse. She could look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow, and could nestle near his chair, and not dread the glance that she so well remembered. She could render him such little tokens of her duty and service, as putting everything in order for him with her own hands, binding little nosegays for his table, changing them as one by one they withered and he did not come back, preparing something for him every day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat. To-day, it was a little painted stand for his watch; to-morrow, she would be afraid to leave it, and would substitute some other trifle of her making not so likely to attract his eye. Waking in the night, perhaps, she would tremble at the thought of his coming home and angrily rejecting it, and would hurry down with slippered feet and quickly beating heart,

and bring it away. At another time, she would only lay her face upon his desk, and leave a kiss there, and a tear.

Still no one knew of this. Unless the household found it out when she was not there — and they all held Mr. Dombey's rooms in awe — it was as deep a secret in her breast as what had gone before it. Florence stole into those rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served down stairs. And although they were in every nook the better and the brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, excepting that she left her light behind.

Shadowy company attended Florence up and down the echoing house, and sat with her in the dismantled rooms. As if her life were an enchanted vision, there arose out of her solitude ministering thoughts, that made it fanciful and unreal. She imagined so often what her life would have been if her father could have loved her and she had been a favourite child, that sometimes, for the moment, she almost believed it was so, and, borne on by the current of that pensive fiction, seemed to remember how they had watched her brother in his grave together; how they had freely shared his heart between them; how they were united in the dear remembrance of him; how they often spoke about him yet; and her kind father, looking at her gently, told her of their common hope and trust in God. At other times she pictured to herself her mother yet alive. And oh the happiness of falling on her neck, and clinging to her with the love and confidence of all her soul! And oh the desolation of the solitary house again, with evening coming on, and no one there!

But there was one thought, scarcely shaped out to herself, yet fervent and strong within her, that upheld Florence when she strove and filled her true young heart, so sorely tried, with constancy of purpose. Into her mind, as into all others contending with the great affliction of our mortal nature, there had stolen solemn wonderings and hopes, arising in the dim world beyond

the present life, and murmuring, like faint music, of recognition in the far off land between her brother and her mother: of some present consciousness in both of her: some love and commiseration for her: and some knowledge of her as she went her way upon the earth. It was a soothing consolation to Florence to give shelter to these thoughts, until one day — it was soon after she had last seen her father in his own room, late at night — the fancy came upon her, that, in weeping for his alienated heart, she might stir the spirits of the dead against him. Wild, weak, childish, as it may have been to think so, and to tremble at the half-formed thought, it was the impulse of her loving nature; and from that hour Florence strove against the cruel wound in her breast, and tried to think of him whose hand had made it, only with hope.

Her father did not know — she held to it from that time — how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would be patient, and would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.

This became the purpose of her life. The morning sun shone down upon the faded house, and found the resolution bright and fresh within the bosom of its solitary mistress. Through all the duties of the day, it animated her; for Florence hoped that the more she knew, and the more accomplished she became, the more glad he would be when he came to know and like her. Sometimes she wondered, with a swelling heart and rising tear, whether she was proficient enough in anything to surprise him when they should become companions. Sometimes she tried to think if there were any kind of knowledge that would bespeak his interest more readily than another. Always: at her books, her music, and her work: in her morning walks, and in her nightly

prayers: she had her engrossing aim in view. Strange study for a child, to learn the road to a hard parent's heart!

There were many careless loungers through the street, as the summer evening deepened into night, who glanced across the road at the sombre house, and saw the youthful figure at the window, such a contrast to it, looking upward at the stars as they began to shine, who would have slept the worse if they had known on what design she mused so steadfastly. The reputation of the mansion as a haunted house, would not have been the gayer with some humble dwellers elsewhere, who were struck by its external gloom in passing and repassing on their daily avocations, and so named it, if they could have read its story in the darkening face. But Florence held her sacred purpose, unsuspected and unaided: and studied only how to bring her father to the understanding that she loved him, and made no appeal against him in any wandering thought.

Thus Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the monotonous walls looked down upon her with a stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like intent to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

Susan Nipper stood opposite to her young mistress one morning, as she folded and sealed a note she had been writing: and showed in her looks an approving knowledge of its contents.

"Better late than never, dear Miss Floy," said Susan, "and I do say, that even a visit to them old Skettleses will be a God-send."

"It is very good of Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, Susan," returned Florence, with a mild correction of that young lady's familiar mention of the family in question, "to repeat their invitation so kindly."

Miss Nipper, who was perhaps the most thorough-going partisan on the face of the earth, and who carried her partisanship into all matters great or small, and perpetually waged war with

it against society, screwed up her lips and shook her head, as a protest against any recognition of disinterestedness in the Skettleses, and a plea in bar that they would have valuable consideration for their kindness, in the company of Florence.

"They know what they're about, if ever people did," murmured Miss Nipper, drawing in her breath, "oh! trust them Skettleses for that!"

"I am not very anxious to go to Fulham, Susan, I confess," said Florence thoughtfully; "but it will be right to go. I think it will be better."

"Much better," interposed Susan, with another emphatic shake of her head.

"And so," said Florence, "though I would prefer to have gone when there was no one there, instead of in this vacation time, when it seems there are some young people staying in the house, I have thankfully said yes."

"For which *I* say, Miss Floy, Oh be joyful!" returned Susan. "Ah! h — h!"

This last ejaculation, with which Miss Nipper frequently wound up a sentence, at about that epoch of time, was supposed below the level of the hall to have a general reference to Mr. Dombey, and to be expressive of a yearning in Miss Nipper to favour that gentleman with a piece of her mind. But she never explained it; and it had, in consequence, the charm of mystery, in addition to the advantage of the sharpest expression.

"How long it is before we have any news of Walter, Susan!" observed Florence after a moment's silence.

"Long indeed, Miss Floy!" replied her maid. "And Perch said, when he came just now to see for letters — but what signifies what *he* says!" exclaimed Susan, reddening and breaking off. "Much *he* knows about it!"

Florence raised her eyes quickly, and a flush overspread her face.

"If I hadn't," said Susan Nipper, evidently struggling with some latent anxiety and alarm, and looking full at her young mistress, while endeavouring to work herself into a state of resentment with the unoffending Mr. Perch's image, "if I hadn't more manliness than that insipidest of his sex, I'd never take pride in my hair again, but turn it up behind my ears, and wear coarse caps, without a bit of border, until death released me from my insignificance, I may not be a Amazon, Miss Floy, and wouldn't so demean myself by such disfigurement, but anyways I'm not a giver-up, I hope."

"Give up! What?" cried Florence, with a face of terror.

"Why, nothing, Miss," said Susan. "Good gracious, nothing! It's only that wet curl-paper of a man, Perch, that any one might almost make away with, with a touch, and really it would be a blessed event for all parties if some one *would* take pity on him, and would have the goodness!"

"Does he give up the ship, Susan?" inquired Florence, very pale.

"No, Miss," returned Susan, "I should like to see him make so bold as do it to my face! No, Miss, but he goes on about some bothering ginger that Mr. Walter was to send to Mrs. Perch, and shakes his dismal head, and says he hopes it may be coming; any how, he says, it can't come now in time for the intended occasion, but may do for next, which really," said Miss Nipper, with aggravated scorn, "puts me out of patience with the man, for though I can bear a great deal, I am not a camel, neither am I," added Susan, after a moment's consideration, "if I know myself, a dromedary neither."

"What else does he say, Susan?" inquired Florence, earnestly. "Won't you tell me?"

"As if I wouldn't tell you anything, Miss Floy, and everything!" said Susan. "Why Miss, he says that there begins to be a general talk about the ship, and that they have never had a

ship on that voyage half so long unheard of, and that the captain's wife was at the office yesterday, and seemed a little put out about it, but any one could say that, we knew nearly that before."

"I must visit Walter's uncle," said Florence, hurriedly, "before I leave home. I will go and see him this morning. Let us walk there, directly, Susan."

Miss Nipper having nothing to urge against the proposal, but being perfectly acquiescent, they were soon equipped, and in the streets, and on their way towards the little Midshipman.

The state of mind in which poor Walter had gone to Captain Cuttle's, on the day when Brogley the broker came into possession, and when there seemed to him to be an execution in the very steeples, was pretty much the same as that in which Florence now took her way to Uncle Sol's; with this difference, that Florence suffered the added pain of thinking that she had been, perhaps, the innocent occasion of involving Walter in peril, and all to whom he was dear, herself included, in an agony of suspense. For the rest, uncertainty and danger seemed written upon everything. The weathercocks on spires and housetops were mysterious with hints of stormy wind, and pointed, like so many ghostly fingers, out to dangerous seas, where fragments of great wrecks were drifting, perhaps, and helpless men were rocked upon them into a sleep as deep as the unfathomable waters. When Florence came into the city, and passed gentlemen who were talking together, she dreaded to hear them speaking of the ship, and saying it was lost. Pictures and prints of vessels fighting with the rolling waves filled her with alarm. The smoke and clouds, though moving gently, moved too fast for her apprehensions, and made her fear there was a tempest blowing at that moment on the ocean.

Susan Nipper may or may not have been affected similarly, but having her attention much engaged in struggles with boys,

whenever there was any press of people — for, between that grade of human kind and herself, there was some natural animosity that invariably broke out, whenever they came together — it would seem that she had not much leisure on the road for intellectual operations.

Arriving in good time abreast of the wooden Midshipman on the opposite side of the way, and waiting for an opportunity to cross the street, they were a little surprised at first to see, at the Instrument-maker's door, a round-headed lad, with his chubby face addressed towards the sky, who, as they looked at him, suddenly thrust into his capacious mouth two fingers of each hand, and with the assistance of that machinery whistled, with astonishing shrillness, to some pigeons at a considerable elevation in the air.

"Mrs. Richards's eldest, Miss!" said Susan, "and the worrit of Mrs. Richards's life!"

As Polly had been to tell Florence of the resuscitated prospects of her son and heir, Florence was prepared for the meeting: so, a favourable moment presenting itself, they both hastened across, without any further contemplation of Mrs. Richards's bane. That sporting character, unconscious of their approach, again whistled with his utmost might, and then yelled in a rapture of excitement, "Strays! Whoo-oop! Strays!" which identification had such an effect upon the conscience-stricken pigeons, that instead of going direct to some town in the North of England, as appeared to have been their original intention, they began to wheel and falter; whereupon Mrs. Richards's first-born pierced them with another whistle, and again yelled, in a voice that rose above the turmoil of the street, "Strays! Whoo-oop! Strays!"

From this transport, he was abruptly recalled to terrestrial objects, by a poke from Miss Nipper, which sent him into the shop.

"Is this the way you show your penitence, when Mrs. Richards has been fretting for you months and months!" said Susan, following the poke. "Where's Mr. Gills?"

Rob, who smoothed his first rebellious glance at Miss Nipper when he saw Florence following, put his knuckles to his hair, in honour of the latter, and said to the former, that Mr. Gills was out.

"Fetch him home," said Miss Nipper, with authority, "and say that my young lady's here."

"I don't know where he's gone," said Rob.

"Is *that* your penitence?" cried Susan, with stinging sharpness.

"Why, how can I go and fetch him when I don't know where to go?" whimpered the baited Rob. "How can you be so unreasonable?"

"Did Mr. Gills say when he should be home?" asked Florence.

"Yes, Miss," replied Rob, with another application of his knuckles to his hair. "He said he should be home early in the afternoon; in about a couple of hours from now, Miss."

"Is he very anxious about his nephew?" inquired Susan.

"Yes, Miss," returned Rob, preferring to address himself to Florence and slighting Nipper; "I should say he was, very much so. He ain't in-doors, Miss, not a quarter of an hour together. He can't settle in one place five minutes. He goes about, like a — just like a stray," said Rob, stooping to get a glimpse of the pigeons through the window, and checking himself, with his fingers half-way to his mouth, on the verge of another whistle.

"Do you know a friend of Mr. Gills, called Captain Cuttle?" inquired Florence, after a moment's reflection.

"Him with a hook, Miss?" rejoined Rob with an illustra-

tive twist of his left hand. "Yes, Miss. He was here the day before yesterday."

"Has he not been here since?" asked Susan.

"No, Miss," returned Rob, still addressing his reply to Florence.

"Perhaps Walter's uncle has gone there, Susan," observed Florence, turning to her.

"To Captain Cuttle's, Miss?" interposed Rob, "no, he's not gone there, Miss. Because he left particular word that if Captain Cuttle called, I should tell him how surprised he was, not to have seen him yesterday, and should make him stop 'till he came back."

"Do you know where Captain Cuttle lives?" asked Florence.

Rob replied in the affirmative, and turning to a greasy parchment book on the shop desk, read the address aloud.

Florence again turned to her maid and took counsel with her in a low voice, while Rob the round-eyed, mindful of his patron's secret charge, looked on and listened. Florence proposed that they should go to Captain Cuttle's house; hear from his own lips, what he thought of the absence of any tidings of the Son and Heir; and bring him, if they could, to comfort Uncle Sol. Susan at first objected slightly, on the score of distance; but a hackney-coach being mentioned by her mistress, withdrew that opposition, and gave in her assent. There were some minutes of discussion between them before they came to this conclusion, during which the staring Rob paid close attention to both speakers, and inclined his ear to each by turns, as if he were appointed arbitrator of the arguments.

In fine, Rob was despatched for a coach, the visitors keeping shop meanwhile; and when he brought it, they got into it, leaving word for Uncle Sol that they would be sure to call again, on their way back. Rob having stared after the coach until it was as invisible as the pigeons had now become, sat down behind the desk

with a most assiduous demeanour; and in order that he might forget nothing of what had transpired, made notes of it on various small scraps of paper, with a vast expenditure of ink. There was no danger of these documents betraying anything, if accidentally lost; for long before a word was dry, it became as profound a mystery to Rob, as if he had had no part whatever in its production.

While he was yet busy with these labours, the hackney-coach, after encountering unheard-of difficulties from swivel-bridges, soft roads, impassable canals, caravans of casks, settlements of scarlet-beans and little wash-houses, and many such obstacles abounding in that country, stopped at the corner of Brig Place. Alighting here, Florence and Susan Nipper walked down the street, and sought out the abode of Captain Cuttle.

It happened by evil chance to be one of Mrs. Mac Stinger's great cleaning days. On these occasions, Mrs. Mac Stinger was knocked up by the policeman at a quarter before three in the morning, and rarely succumbed before twelve o'clock next night. The chief object of this institution appeared to be, that Mrs. Mac Stinger should move all the furniture into the back garden at early dawn, walk about the house in pattens all day, and move the furniture back again after dark. These ceremonies greatly fluttered those doves the young Mac Stingers, who were not only unable at such times to find any resting-place for the soles of their feet, but generally came in for a good deal of pecking from the maternal bird during the progress of the solemnities.

At the moment when Florence and Susan Nipper presented themselves at Mrs. Mac Stinger's door, that worthy but redoubtable female was in the act of conveying Alexander Mac Stinger, aged two years and three months, along the passage, for forcible deposition in a sitting posture on the street pavement: Alexander being black in the face with holding his breath after

punishment, and a cool paving-stone being usually found to act as a powerful restorative in such cases.

The feelings of Mrs. Mac Stinger, as a woman and a mother, were outraged by the look of pity for Alexander which she observed on Florence's face. Therefore, Mrs. Mac Stinger asserting those finest emotions of our nature, in preference to weakly gratifying her curiosity, shook and buffeted Alexander, both before and during the application of the paving-stone, and took no further notice of the strangers.

"I beg your pardon, Ma'am," said Florence, when the child had found his breath again, and was using it. "Is this Captain Cuttle's house?"

"No," said Mrs. Mac Stinger.

"Not Number Nine?" asked Florence, hesitating.

"Who said it wasn't Number Nine?" said Mrs. Mac Stinger.

Susan Nipper instantly struck in, and begged to inquire what Mrs. Mac Stinger meant by that, and if she knew whom she was talking to.

Mrs. Mac Stinger in retort, looked at her all over. "What do *you* want with Captain Cuttle, I should wish to know!" said Mrs. Mac Stinger.

"Should you? Then I'm sorry that you won't be satisfied," returned Miss Nipper.

"Hush, Susan! If you please!" said Florence. "Perhaps you can have the goodness to tell us where Captain Cuttle lives, Ma'am, as he don't live here."

"Who says he don't live here?" retorted the implacable Mac Stinger. "I said it wasn't Cap'en Cuttle's house — and it a'nt his house — and forbid it, that it ever should be his house — for Cap'en Cuttle don't know how to keep a house — and don't deserve to have a house — it's *my* house — and when I let the

upper floor to Cap'en Cuttle, oh I do a thankless thing, and cast pearls before swine!"

Mrs. Mac Stinger pitched her voice for the upper windows in offering these remarks, and cracked off each clause sharply by itself as if from a rifle possessing an infinity of barrels. After the last shot, the Captain's voice was heard to say, in feeble remonstance from his own room, "Steady below!"

"Since you want Cap'en Cuttle, there he is!" said Mrs. Mac Stinger, with an angry motion of her hand. On Florence making bold to enter, without any more parley, and on Susan following, Mrs. Mac Stinger recommenced her pedestrian exercise in patten, and Alexander Mac Stinger (still on the paving-stone), who had stopped in his crying to attend to the conversation, began to wail again, entertaining himself during that dismal performance, which was quite mechanical, with a general survey of the prospect, terminating in the hackney-coach.

The Captain in his own apartment was sitting with his hands in his pockets and his legs drawn up under his chair, on a very small desolate island, lying about midway in an ocean of soap and water. The Captain's windows had been cleaned, the walls had been cleaned, the stove had been cleaned, and everything, the stove excepted, was wet, and shining with soft soap and sand: the smell of which dry-saltery impregnated the air. In the midst of the dreary scene the Captain, cast away upon his island, looked round on the waste of waters with a rueful countenance, and seemed waiting for some friendly bark to come that way, and take him off.

But when the Captain, directing his forlorn visage towards the door, saw Florence appear with her maid, no words can describe his astonishment. Mrs. Mac Stinger's eloquence having rendered all other sounds but imperfectly distinguishable, he had looked for no rarer visitor than the potboy or the milkman; wherefore, when Florence appeared, and coming to the

confines of the island, put her hand in his, the Captain stood up, aghast, as if he supposed her, for the moment, to be some young member of the Flying Dutchman's family.

Instantly recovering his self-possession, however, the Captain's first care was to place her on dry land, which he happily accomplished, with one motion of his arm. Issuing forth, then, upon the main, Captain Cuttle took Miss Nipper round the waist, and bore her to the island also. Captain Cuttle, then, with great respect and admiration, raised the hand of Florence to his lips, and standing off a little (for the island was not large enough for three), beamed on her from the soap and water like a new description of Triton.

"You are amazed to see us, I am sure," said Florence, with a smile.

The inexpressible gratified Captain kissed his hook in reply, and growled, as if a choice and delicate compliment were included in the words, "Stand by! Stand by!"

"But I couldn't rest," said Florence, "without coming to ask you what you think about dear Walter — who is my brother now — and whether there is anything to fear, and whether you will not go and console his poor uncle every day, until we have some intelligence of him?"

At these words Captain Cuttle, as by an involuntary gesture, clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited.

"Have you any fears for Walter's safety?" inquired Florence, from whose face the Captain (so enraptured he was with it) could not take his eyes: while she, in her turn, looked earnestly at him, to be assured of the sincerity of his reply.

"No, Heart's-delight," said Captain Cuttle, "I am not afeard. Wal'r is a lad as 'll go through a deal o' hard weather. Wal'r is a lad as 'll bring as much success to that 'ere brig as a lad is capable on. Wal'r," said the Captain, his eyes glistening with

the praise of his young friend, and his hook raised to announce a beautiful quotation, "is what you may call a out'ard and visible sign of a in'ard and spirited grasp, and when found make a note of."

Florence, who did not quite understand this, though the Captain evidently thought it full of meaning, and highly satisfactory, mildly looked to him for something more.

"I am not afeard, my Heart's-delight," resumed the Captain. "There 's been most uncommon bad weather in them latitudes, there 's no denyin, and they have drove and drove and been beat off, may be t' other side the world. But the ship 's a good ship, and the lad 's a good lad; and it ain't easy, thank the Lord," the Captain made a little bow, "to break up hearts of oak, whether they 're in brigs or buzzums. Here we have 'em both ways, which is bringing it up with a round turn, and so I ain't a bit afeard as yet."

"As yet?" repeated Florence.

"Not a bit," returned the Captain, kissing his iron hand; "and afore I begin to be, my Heart's-delight, Wal'r will have wrote home from the island, or from some port or another, and made all taut and ship-shape. And with regard to old Sol Gills," here the Captain became solemn, "who I 'll stand by, and not desert until death doe us part, and when the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow — overhaul the Catechism," said the Captain, parenthetically, "and there you 'll find them expressions — if it would console Sol Gills to have the opinion of a seafaring man as has got a mind equal to any undertaking that he puts it alongside of, and as was all but smashed in his 'prenticeship, and of which the name is Bunsby, that 'ere man shall give him such an opinion in his own parlour as 'll stun him. Ah!" said Captain Cuttle, vauntingly, "as much as if he 'd gone and knocked his head again a door!"

"Let us take this gentleman to see him, and let us hear what

he says," cried Florence. "Will you go with us now. We have a coach here."

Again the Captain clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited. But at this instant a most remarkable phenomenon occurred. The door opening, without any note of preparation, and apparently of itself, the hard glazed hat in question skimmed into the room like a bird, and alighted heavily at the Captain's feet. The door then shut as violently as it had opened, and nothing ensued in explanation of the prodigy.

Captain Cuttle picked up his hat, and having turned it over with a look of interest and welcome, began to polish it on his sleeve. While doing so, the Captain eyed his visitors intently, and said in a low voice:

"You see I should have bore down on Sol Gills yesterday, and this morning, but she — she took it away and kep it. That's the long and short of the subject."

"Wo did, for goodness' sake?" asked Susan Nipper.

"The lady of the house, my dear," returned the Captain, in a gruff whisper, and making signals of secrecy. "We had some words about the swabbing of these here planks, and she — in short," said the Captain, eyeing the door, and relieving himself with a long breath, "she stopped my liberty."

"Oh! I wish she had me to deal with!" said Susan, reddening with the energy of the wish. "I'd stop her!"

"Would you, do you think, my dear?" rejoined the Captain, shaking his head doubtfully, but regarding the desperate courage of the fair aspirant with obvious admiration. "I don't know. It's difficult navigation. She's very hard to carry on with, my dear. You never can tell how she'll head, you see. She's full one minute, and round upon you next. And when she is a tartar," said the Captain, with the perspiration breaking out upon his forehead — There was nothing but a whistle emphatic

enough for the conclusion of the sentence, so the Captain whistled tremulously. After which he again shook his head, and recurring to his admiration of Miss Nipper's devoted bravery, timidly repeated, "Would you, do you think, my dear?"

Susan only replied with a bridling smile, but that was so very full of defiance, that there is no knowing how long Captain Cuttle might have stood entranced in its contemplation, if Florence in her anxiety had not again proposed their immediately resorting to the oracular Bunsby. Thus reminded of his duty, Captain Cuttle put on the glazed hat firmly, took up another knobby stick, with which he had supplied the place of that one given to Walter, and offering his arm to Florence, prepared to cut his way through the enemy.

It turned out, however, that Mrs. Mac Stinger had already changed her course, and that she headed, as the Captain had remarked she often did, in quite a new direction. For when they got down stairs, they found that exemplary woman beating the mats on the door-steps, with Alexander, still upon the paving-stone, dimly looming through a fog of dust; and so absorbed was Mrs. Mac Stinger in her household occupation, that when Captain Cuttle and his visitors passed, she beat the harder, and neither by word nor gesture showed any consciousness of their vicinity. The Captain was so well pleased with this easy escape — although the effect of the door-mats on him was like a copious administration of snuff, and made him sneeze until the tears ran down his face — that he could hardly believe his good fortune; but more than once, between the door and the hackney-coach, looked over his shoulder, with an obvious apprehension of Mrs. Mac Stinger's giving chase yet.

However, they got to the corner of Brig Place without any molestation from that terrible fire-ship; and the Captain mounting the coach-box — for his gallantry would not allow him to ride inside with the ladies, though besought to do so — piloted the

driver on his course for Captain Bunsby's vessel, which was called the Cautious Clara, and was lying hard by Ratcliffe.

Arrived at the wharf off which this great commander's ship was jammed in among some five hundred companions, whose tangled rigging looked like monstrous cobwebs half swept down, Captain Cuttle appeared at the coach window, and invited Florence and Miss Nipper to accompany him on board; observing that Bunsby was to the last degree soft-hearted in respect of ladies, and that nothing would so much tend to bring his expansive intellect into a state of harmony as their presentation to the Cautious Clara.

Florence readily consented; and the Captain, taking her little hand in his prodigious palm, led her, with a mixed expression of patronage, paternity, pride, and ceremony, that was pleasant to see, over several very dirty decks, until, coming to the Clara, they found that cautious craft (which lay outside the tier) with her gangway removed, and half-a-dozen feet of river interposed between herself and her nearest neighbour. It appeared, from Captain Cuttle's explanation, that the great Bunsby, like himself, was cruelly treated by his landlady, and that when her usage of him for the time being was so hard that he could bear it no longer, he set this gulf between them as a last resource.

"Clara a-hoy!" cried the Captain, putting a hand to each side of his mouth.

"A-hoy!" cried a boy, like the Captain's echo, tumbling up from below.

"Bunsby aboard?" cried the Captain, hailing the boy in a stentorian voice, as if he were half-a-mile off instead of two yards.

"Aye, aye!" cried the boy, in the same tone.

The boy then shoved out a plank to Captain Cuttle, who adjusted it carefully, and led Florence across: returning presently for Miss Nipper. So they stood upon the deck of the Cautious

Clara, in whose standing rigging, divers fluttering articles of dress were curing, in company with a few tongues and some mackerel.

Immediately there appeared, coming slowly up above the bulk-head of the cabin, another bulk-head — human, and very large — with one stationary eye in the mahogany face, and one revolving one, on the principle of some light-houses. This head was decorated with shaggy hair, like oakum, which had no governing inclination towards the north, east, west, or south, but inclined to all four quarters of the compass, and to every point upon it. The head was followed by a perfect desert of chin, and by a shirt-collar and neckerchief, and by a dreadnought pilot coat, and a by a pair of dreadnought pilot trousers, whereof the waistband was so very broad and high, that it became a succedaneum for a waistcoat: being ornamented near the wearer's breast-bone with some massive wooden buttons like backgammon men. As the lower portions of these pantaloons became revealed, Bunsby stood confessed; his hands in their pockets, which were of vast size; and his gaze directed, not to Captain Cuttle or the ladies, but the mast-head.

The profound appearance of this philosopher, who was bulky and strong, and on whose extremely red face an expression of taciturnity sat enthroned, not inconsistent with his character in which that quality was proudly conspicuous, almost daunted Captain Cuttle, though on familiar terms with him. Whispering to Florence that Bunsby had never in his life expressed surprise, and was considered not to know what it meant, the Captain watched him as he eyed his mast-head, and afterwards swept the horizon; and when the revolving eye seemed to be coming round in his direction, said:

“Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?”

A deep, gruff, husky utterance, which seemed to have no connection with Bunsby, and certainly had not the least effect

upon his face, replied, "Aye, aye, shipmet, how goes it!" At the same time Bunsby's right hand and arm emerging from a pocket, shook the Captain's, and went back again.

"Bunsby," said the Captain, striking home at once, "here you are; a man of mind, and a man as can give an opinion. Here's a young lady as wants to take that opinion, in regard of my friend Wal'r; likewise my t'other friend, Sol Gills, which is a character for you to come within hail of, being a man of science, which is the mother of invention, and knows no law. Bunsby, will you wear, to oblige me, and come along with us?"

The great commander, who seemed by the expression of his visage to be always on the look-out for something in the extremest distance, and to have no ocular knowledge of anything within ten miles, made no reply whatever.

"Here is a man," said the Captain, addressing himself to his fair auditors, and indicating the commander with his outstretched hook, "that has fell down, more than any man alive; that has had more accidents happen to his own self than the Seamen's Hospital to all hands; that took as many spars and bars and bolts about the outside of his head when he was young, as you'd want a order for on Chatham-yard to build a pleasure-yacht with; and yet that got his opinions in that way, it's my belief, for there an't nothing like 'em afloat or ashore."

The stolid commander appeared, by a very slight vibration in his elbows, to express some satisfaction in this encomium; but if his face had been as distant as his gaze was, it could hardly have enlightened the beholders less in reference to anything that was passing in his thoughts.

"Shipmet," said Bunsby, all of a sudden, and stooping down to look out under some interposing spar, "what'll the ladies drink?"

Captain Cuttle, whose delicacy was shocked by such an inquiry in connection with Florence, drew the sage aside, and seeming to explain in his ear, accompanied him below; where,

that he might not take offence, the Captain drank a dram himself, which Florence and Susan, glancing down the open skylight, saw the sage, with difficulty finding room for himself between his berth and a very little brass fireplace, serve out for self and friend. They soon reappeared on deck, and Captain Cuttle, triumphing in the success of his enterprise, conducted Florence back to the coach, while Bunsby followed, escorting Miss Nipper, whom he hugged upon the way (much to that young lady's indignation) with his pilot-coated arm, like a blue bear.

The Captain put his oracle inside, and gloried so much in having secured him, and having got that mind into a hackney-coach, that he could not refrain from often peeping in at Florence through the little window behind the driver, and testifying his delight in smiles, and also in taps upon his forehead to hint to her that the brain of Bunsby was hard at it. In the mean time, Bunsby, still hugging Miss Nipper (for his friend, the Captain, had not exaggerated the softness of his heart), uniformly preserved his gravity of deportment, and showed no other consciousness of her or anything.

Uncle Sol, who had come home, received them at the door, and ushered them immediately into the little back parlour: strangely altered by the absence of Walter. On the table, and about the room, were the charts and maps on which the heavy-hearted Instrument-maker had again and again tracked the missing vessel across the sea, and on which, with a pair of compasses that he still had in his hand, he had been measuring, a minute before, how far she must have driven, to have driven here or there: and trying to demonstrate that a long time must elapse before hope was exhausted.

"Whether she can have run," said Uncle Sol, looking wistfully over the chart; "but no, that's almost impossible. Or whether she can have been forced by stress of weather, — but that's not reasonably likely. Or whether there is any hope she so

far changed her course as — but even I can hardly hope that!” With such broken suggestions, poor old Uncle Sol roamed over the great sheet before him, and could not find a speck of hopeful probability in it large enough to set one small point of the compasses upon.

Florence saw immediately — it would have been difficult to help seeing — that there was a singular, indescribable change in the old man, and that while his manner was far more restless and unsettled than usual, there was yet a curious, contradictory decision in it, that perplexed her very much. She fancied once that he spoke wildly, and at random; for on her saying she regretted not to have seen him when she had been there before that morning, he at first replied that he had been to see her, and directly afterwards seemed to wish to recall that answer.

“You have been to see me?” said Florence. “To-day?”

“Yes, my dear young lady,” returned Uncle Sol, looking at her and away from her in a confused manner. “I wished to see you with my own eyes, and to hear you with my own ears, once more before —” There he stopped.

“Before when? Before what?” said Florence, putting her hand upon his arm.

“Did I say ‘before?’” replied old Sol. “If I did, I must have meant before we should have news of my dear boy.”

“You are not well,” said Florence, tenderly. “You have been so very anxious. I am sure you are not well.”

“I am as well,” returned the old man, shutting up his right hand, and holding it out to show her: “as well and firm as any man at my time of life can hope to be. See! It’s steady. Is its master not as capable of resolution and fortitude as many a younger man? I think so. We shall see.”

There was that in his manner more than in his words, though they remained with her too, which impressed Florence so much, that she would have confided her uneasiness to Captain Cuttle at

that moment, if the Captain had not seized that moment for expounding the state of circumstances on which the opinion of the sagacious Bunsby was requested, and entreating that profound authority to deliver the same.

Bunsby, whose eye continued to be addressed to somewhere about the half-way house between London and Gravesend, two or three times put out his rough right arm, as seeking to wind it for inspiration, round the fair form of Miss Nipper; but that young female having withdrawn herself, in displeasure, to the opposite side of the table, the soft heart of the Commander of the Cautious Clara met with no response to its impulses. After sundry failures in this wise, the Commander, addressing himself to nobody, thus spake; or rather the voice within him said of its own accord, and quite independent of himself, as if he were possessed by a gruff spirit:

“My name ’s Jack Bunsby!”

“He was christened John,” cried the delighted Captain Cuttle. “Hear him!”

“And what I says,” pursued the voice, after some deliberation, “I stands to.”

The Captain, with Florence on his arm, nodded at the auditory, and seemed to say, “Now he ’s coming out. This is what I meant, when I brought him.”

“Whereby,” proceeded the voice, “why not? If so, what odds? Can any man say otherwise? No. Awast then!”

When it had pursued its train of argument to this point, the voice stopped, and rested. It then proceeded very slowly, thus:

“Do I believe that this here Son and Heir ’s gone down, my lads? Mayhap. Do I say so? Which? If a skipper stands out by Sen’ George’s Channel, making for the Downs, what ’s right ahead of him? The Goodwins. He isn’t forced to run upon the Goodwins, but he may. The bearings of this observation

lays in the application on it. That a'nt no part of my duty. Awast then, keep a bright look-out for'ard, and good luck to you!"

The voice here went out of the back parlour and into the street, taking the Commander of the Cautious Clara with it, and accompanying him on board again with all convenient expedition, where he immediately turned in, and refreshed his mind with a nap.

The students of the sage's precepts, left to their own application of his wisdom — upon a principle which was the main leg of the Bunsby tripod, as it is perchance of some other oracular stools — looked upon one another in a little uncertainty; while Rob the Grinder, who had taken the innocent freedom of peering in, and listening, through the skylight in the roof, came softly down from the leads, in a state of very dense confusion. Captain Cuttle, however, whose admiration of Bunsby was, if possible, enhanced by the splendid manner in which he had justified his reputation and come through this solemn reference, proceeded to explain that Bunsby meant nothing but confidence; that Bunsby had no misgivings; and that such an opinion as that man had given, coming from such a mind as his, was Hope's own anchor, with good roads to cast it in. Florence endeavoured to believe that the Captain was right; but the Nipper, with her arms tight folded, shook her head in resolute denial, and had no more trust in Bunsby than in Mr. Perch himself.

The philosopher seemed to have left Uncle Sol pretty much where he had found him, for he still went roaming about the watery world, compasses in hand, and discovering no rest for them. It was in pursuance of a whisper in his ear from Florence, while the old man was absorbed in this pursuit, that Captain Cuttle laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"What cheer, Sol Gills?" cried the Captain, heartily.

"But so-so, Ned," returned the Instrument-maker. "I have

been remembering, all this afternoon, that on the very day when my boy entered Dombey's house, and came home late to dinner, sitting just there where you stand, we talked of storm and shipwreck, and I could hardly turn him from the subject."

But meeting the eyes of Florence, which were fixed with earnest scrutiny upon his face, the old man stopped and smiled.

"Stand by, old friend!" cried the Captain. "Look alive! I tell you what, Sol Gills; arter I 've convoyed Heart's-delight safe home," here the Captain kissed his hook to Florence, "I 'll come back and take you in tow for the rest of this blessed day. You 'll come and eat your dinner along with me, Sol, somewheres or other."

"Not to-day, Ned!" said the old man quickly, and appearing to be unaccountably startled by the proposition. "Not to-day. I couldn't do it!"

"Why not?" returned the Captain, gazing at him in astonishment.

"I — I have so much to do. I — I mean to think of, and arrange. I couldn't do it, Ned, indeed. I must go out again, and be alone, and turn my mind to many things to-day."

The Captain looked at the Instrument-maker, and looked at Florence, and again at the Instrument-maker. "To-morrow, then," he suggested, at last.

"Yes, yes. To-morrow," said the old man. "Think of me to-morrow. Say to-morrow."

"I shall come here early, mind, Sol Gills," stipulated the Captain.

"Yes, yes. The first thing to-morrow morning," said old Sol; "and now good bye Ned Cuttle, and God bless you!"

Squeezing both the Captain's hands, with uncommon fervour, as he said it, the old man turned to Florence, folded hers in his own, and put them to his lips; then hurried her out to the coach with very singular precipitation. Altogether, he made such an

effect on Captain Cuttle that the Captain lingered behind, and instructed Rob to be particularly gentle and attentive to his master until the morning: which injunction he strengthened with the payment of one shilling down, and the promise of another sixpence before noon next day. This kind office performed, Captain Cuttle, who considered himself the natural and lawful body-guard of Florence, mounted the box with a mighty sense of his trust, and escorted her home. At parting, he assured her that he would stand by Sol Gills, close and true; and once again inquired of Susan Nipper, unable to forget her gallant words in reference to Mrs. Mac Stinger, "Would you, do you think, my dear, though!"

When the desolate house had closed upon the two, the Captain's thoughts reverted to the old Instrument-maker, and he felt uncomfortable. Therefore, instead of going home, he walked up and down the street several times, and, eking out his leisure until evening, dined late at a certain angular little tavern in the city, with a public parlour like a wedge, to which glazed hats much resorted. The Captain's principal intention was to pass Sol Gills's after dark, and look in through the window; which he did. The parlour door stood open, and he could see his old friend writing busily and steadily at the table within, while the little Midshipman, already sheltered from the night dews, watched him from the counter; under which Rob the Grinder made his own bed, preparatory to shutting the shop. Re-assured by the tranquillity that reigned within the precincts of the wooden mariner, the Captain headed for Brig Place, resolving to weigh anchor betimes in the morning.

CHAPTER IV.

The study of a loving heart.

SIR BARNET and Lady Skettles, very good people, resided in a pretty villa at Fulham, on the banks of the Thames; which was one of the most desirable residences in the world when a rowing-match happened to be going past, but had its little inconveniences at other times, among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the cotemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery.

Sir Barnet Skettles expressed his personal consequence chiefly through an antique gold snuff-box, and a ponderous silk pocket-handkerchief, which he had an imposing manner of drawing out of his pocket like a banner, and using with both hands at once. Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water — not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison — it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever-widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system.

Sir Barnet was proud of making people acquainted with people. He liked the thing for its own sake, and it advanced his favourite object too. For example, if Sir Barnet had the good fortune to get hold of a raw recruit, or a country gentleman, and ensnared him to his hospitable villa, Sir Barnet would say to him, on the morning after his arrival, "Now, my dear Sir, is there anybody you would like to know? Who is there you would wish to meet? Do you take any interest in writing people, or in painting or sculpturing people, or in acting people, or in anything of that sort?"

Possibly the patient answered yes, and mentioned somebody, of whom Sir Barnet had no more personal knowledge than of Ptolemy the Great. Sir Barnet replied, that nothing on earth was easier, as he knew him very well: immediately called on the aforesaid somebody, left his card, wrote a short note, — “My dear Sir — penalty of your eminent position — friend at my house naturally desirous — Lady Skettles and myself participate — trust that genius being superior to ceremonies, you will do us the distinguished favour of giving us the pleasure,” &c. &c. — and so killed a brace of birds with one stone, dead as door-nails.

With the snuff-box and banner in full force, Sir Barnet Skettles propounded his usual inquiry to Florence on the first morning of her visit. When Florence thanked him, and said there was no one in particular whom she desired to see, it was natural she should think, with a pang, of poor lost Walter. When Sir Barnet Skettles, urging his kind offer, said, “My dear Miss Dombey, are you sure you can remember no one whom your good Papa — to whom I beg you to present the best compliments of myself and Lady Skettles when you write — might wish you to know?” it was as natural, perhaps, that her poor head should droop a little, and that her voice should tremble as it softly answered in the negative.

Skettles junior, much stiffened as to his cravat, and sobered down as to his spirits, was at home for the holidays, and appeared to feel himself aggrieved by the solicitude of his excellent mother that he should be attentive to Florence. Another and a deeper injury under which the soul of young Barnet chafed, was the company of Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, who had been invited on a visit to the parental roof-tree, and of whom the young gentleman often said he would have preferred their passing the vacation at Jericho.

“Is there anybody *you* can suggest, now, Doctor Blimber,” said Sir Barnet Skettles, turning to that gentleman.

"You are very kind, Sir Barnet," returned Doctor Blimber. "Really I am not aware that there is, in particular. I like to know my fellow men in general, Sir Barnet. What does Terence say? Any one who is the parent of a son is interesting to *me*."

"Has Mrs. Blimber any wish to see any remarkable person?" asked Sir Barnet courteously.

Mrs. Blimber replied, with a sweet smile and a shake of her sky-blue cap, that if Sir Barnet could have made her known to Cicero, she would have troubled him; but such an introduction not being feasible, and she already enjoying the friendship of himself and his amiable lady, and possessing with the Doctor her husband their joint confidence in regard to their dear son — here young Barnet was observed to curl his nose — she asked no more.

Sir Barnet was fain, under these circumstances, to content himself for the time with the company assembled. Florence was glad of that; for she had a study to pursue among them, and it lay too near her heart, and was too precious and momentous, to yield to any other interest.

There were some children staying in the house. Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers as those rosy faces opposite home. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it. Florence sought to learn their secret; sought to find out what it was she had missed; what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father that she loved him, and to win his love again.

Many a day did Florence thoughtfully observe these children. On many a bright morning did she leave her bed when the glorious sun rose, and walking up and down upon the river's bank, before any one in the house was stirring, look up at the windows of their rooms, and think of them, asleep, so gently tended and affectionately thought of. Florence would feel more lonely then,

than in the great house all alone; and would think sometimes that she was better there than here, and that there was greater peace in hiding herself than in mingling with others of her age, and finding how unlike them all she was. But attentive to her study, though it touched her to the quick at every little leaf she turned in the hard book, Florence remained among them, and tried, with patient hope, to gain the knowledge that she wearied for.

Ah! how to gain it! how to know the charm in its beginning! There were daughters here, who rose up in the morning, and lay down to rest at night, possessed of fathers' hearts already. They had no repulse to overcome, no coldness to dread, no frown to smooth away. As the morning advanced, and the windows opened one by one, and the dew began to dry upon the flowers and grass, and youthful feet began to move upon the lawn, Florence, glancing round at the bright faces, thought what was there she could learn from these children? It was too late to learn from them; each could approach her father fearlessly, and put up her lips to meet the ready kiss, and wind her arm about the neck that bent down to caress her. *She* could not begin by being so bold. Oh! could it be that there was less and less hope as she studied more and more!

She remembered well, that even the old woman who had robbed her when a little child — whose image and whose house, and all she had said and done, were stamped upon her recollection, with the enduring sharpness of a fearful impression made at that early period of life — had spoken fondly of her daughter, and how terribly even she had cried out in the pain of hopeless separation from her child. But her own mother, she would think again, when she recalled this, had loved her well. Then, sometimes, when her thoughts reverted swiftly to the void between herself and her father, Florence would tremble, and the tears would start upon her face, as she pictured to herself her mother living on, and

coming also to dislike her, because of her wanting the unknown grace that should conciliate that father naturally, and had never done so from her cradle. She knew that this imagination did wrong to her mother's memory, and had no truth in it, or base to rest upon; and yet she tried so hard to justify him, and to find the whole blame in herself, that she could not resist its passing, like a wild cloud, through the distance of her mind.

There came among the other visitors, soon after Florence, one beautiful girl, three or four years younger than she, who was an orphan child, and who was accompanied by her aunt, a grey-haired lady, who spoke much to Florence, and who greatly liked (but that they all did) to hear her sing of an evening, and would always sit near her at that time, with motherly interest. They had only been two days in the house, when Florence, being in an arbour in the garden one warm morning, musingly observant of a youthful group upon the turf, through some intervening boughs, and wreathing flowers for the head of one little creature among them who was the pet and plaything of the rest, heard this same lady and her niece, in pacing up and down a sheltered nook close by, speak of herself.

"Is Florence an orphan like me, aunt?" said the child.

"No, my love. She has no mother, but her father is living."

"Is she in mourning for her poor mamma now?" inquired the child, quickly.

"No; for her only brother."

"Has she no other brother?"

"None."

"No sister?"

"None."

"I am very, very sorry!" said the little girl.

As they stopped soon afterwards to watch some boats, and had been silent in the meantime, Florence, who had risen when she heard her name, and had gathered up her flowers to go and

meet them, that they might know of her being within hearing, resumed her seat and work, excepting to hear no more; but the conversation recommenced next moment.

“Florence is a favourite with every one here, and deserves to be, I am sure,” said the child, earnestly. “Where is her papa?”

The aunt replied, after a moment’s pause, that she did not know. Her tone of voice arrested Florence, who had started from her seat again; and held her fastened to the spot, with her work hastily caught up to her bosom, and her two hands saving it from being scattered on the ground.

“He is in England I hope, aunt?” said the child.

“I believe so. Yes; I know he is, indeed.”

“Has he ever been here?”

“I believe not. No.”

“Is he coming here to see her?”

“I believe not.”

“Is he lame, or blind, or ill, aunt?” asked the child.

The flowers that Florence held to her breast began to fall when she heard those words, so wonderingly spoken. She held them closer; and her face hung down upon them.

“Kate,” said the lady, after another moment of silence, “I will tell you the whole truth about Florence as I have heard it, and believe it to be. Tell no one else, my dear, because it may be little known here, and your doing so would give her pain.”

“I never will!” exclaimed the child.

“I know you never will,” returned the lady. “I can trust you as myself. I fear then, Kate, that Florence’s father cares little for her, very seldom sees her, never was kind to her in her life, and now quite shuns her and avoids her. She would love him dearly if he would suffer her, but he will not — though for no fault of her’s; and she is greatly to be loved and pitied by all gentle hearts.”

More of the flowers that Florence held, fell scattering on the ground; those that remained were wet, but not with dew; and her face dropped upon her laden hands.

"Poor Florence! Dear, good Florence!" cried the child.

"Do you know why I have told you this, Kate?" said the lady.

"That I may be very kind to her, and take great care to try to please her. Is that the reason, aunt?"

"Partly," said the lady, "but not all. Though we see her so cheerful; with a pleasant smile for every one; ready to oblige us all, and bearing her part in every amusement here: she can hardly be quite happy, do you think she can, Kate?"

"I am afraid not," said the little girl.

"And you can understand," pursued the lady, "why her observation of children who have parents who are fond of them, and proud of them — like many here, just now — should make her sorrowful in secret?"

"Yes, dear aunt," said the child, "I understand that very well. Poor Florence!"

More flowers strayed upon the ground, and those she yet held to her breast trembled as if a wintry wind were rustling them.

"My Kate," said the lady, whose voice was serious, but very calm and sweet, and had so impressed Florence from the first moment of her hearing it, "Of all the youthful people here, you are her natural and harmless friend; you have not the innocent means, that happier children have" —

"There are none happier, aunt!" exclaimed the child, who seemed to cling about her.

— "As other children have, dear Kate, of reminding her of her misfortune. Therefore I would have you, when you try to be her little friend, try all the more for that, and feel that the bereavement you sustained — thank Heaven! before you knew its weight — gives you claim and hold upon poor Florence."

“But I am not without a parent’s love, aunt, and I never have been,” said the child, “with you.”

“However that may be, my dear,” returned the lady, “your misfortune is a lighter one than Florence’s; for not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent’s love.”

The flowers were scattered on the ground like dust; the empty hands were spread upon the face; and orphaned Florence, shrinking down upon the ground, wept long and bitterly.

But true of heart and resolute in her good purpose, Florence held to it as her dying mother held by her upon the day that gave Paul life. He did not know how much she loved him. However long the time in coming, and however slow the interval, she must try to bring that knowledge to her father’s heart one day or other. Meantime she must be careful in no thoughtless word, or look, or burst of feeling awakened by any chance circumstance, to complain against him, or to give occasion for these whispers to his prejudice.

Even in the response she made the orphan child, to whom she was attracted strongly, and whom she had such occasion to remember, Florence was mindful of him. If she singled her out too plainly (Florence thought) from among the rest, she would confirm — in one mind certainly: perhaps in more — the belief that he was cruel and unnatural. Her own delight was no set-off to this. What she had overheard was a reason, not for soothing herself, but for saving him; and Florence did it, in pursuance of the study of her heart.

She did so always. If a book were read aloud, and there were anything in the story that pointed at an unkind father, she was in pain for their application of it to him; not for herself. So with any trifle of an interlude that was acted, or picture that was shown, or game that was played, among them. The occasions for such tenderness towards him were so many, that her mind mis-

gave her often, it would indeed be better to go back to the old house, and live again within the shadow of its dull walls, undisturbed. How few who saw sweet Florence, in her spring of womanhood, the modest little queen of those small revels, imagined what a load of sacred care lay heavy in her breast! How few of those who stiffened in her father's freezing atmosphere, suspected what a heap of fiery coals was piled upon his head!

Florence pursued her study patiently, and, failing to acquire the secret of the nameless grace she sought, among the youthful company who were assembled in the house, often walked out alone, in the early morning, among the children of the poor. But still she found them all too far advanced to learn from. They had won their household places long ago, and did not stand without, as she did, with a bar across the door.

There was one man whom she several times observed at work very early, and often with a girl of about her own age seated near him. He was a very poor man, who seemed to have no regular employment, but now went roaming about the banks of the river when the tide was low, looking out for bits and scraps in the mud; and now worked at the unpromising little patch of garden-ground before his cottage; and now tinkered up a miserable old boat that belonged to him; or did some job of that kind for a neighbour, as chance occurred. Whatever the man's labour, the girl was never employed; but sat, when she was with him, in a listless, moping state, and idle.

Florence had often wished to speak to this man; yet she had never taken courage to do so, as he made no movement towards her. But one morning when she happened to come upon him suddenly, from a by-path among some pollard willows which terminated in the little shelving piece of stony ground that lay between his dwelling and the water, where he was bending over a fire he had made to caulk the old boat which was lying bottom

upwards, close by, he raised his head at the sound of her footstep, and gave her Good morning.

"Good morning," said Florence, approaching nerver, "you are at work early."

"I'd be glad to be often at work earlier, Miss, if I had work to do."

"Is it so hard to get?" asked Florence.

"I find it so," replied the man.

Florence glanced to where the girl was sitting, drawn together, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, and said:

"Is that your daughter?"

He raised his head quickly, and looking towards the girl with a brightened face, nodded to her, and said "Yes." Florence looked towards her too, and gave her a kind salutation; the girl muttered something in return, ungraciously and sullenly.

"Is she in want of employment also?" said Florence.

The man shook his head. "No, Miss," he said. "I work for both."

"Are there only you two, then?" inquired Florence.

"Only us two," said the man. "Her mother has been dead these ten year. Martha!" (he lifted up his head again, and whistled to her) "Won't you say a word to the pretty young lady?"

The girl made an impatient gesture with her cowering shoulders, and turned her head another way. Ugly, mis-shapen, peevish, ill-conditioned, ragged, dirty — but beloved! Oh, yes! Florence had seen her father's look towards her, and she knew whose look it had no likeness to.

"I'm afraid she's worse this morning, my poor girl!" said the man, suspending his work, and contemplating his ill-favoured child, with a compassion that was the more tender for being rough.

"She is ill, then!" said Florence.

The man drew a deep sigh. "I don't believe my Martha's had five short days' good health," he answered, looking at her still, "in as many long years."

"Aye! and more than that, John," said a neighbour, who had come down to help him with the boat.

"More than that, you say, do you?" cried the other, pushing back his battered hat, and drawing his hand across his forehead. "Very like. It seems a long, long time."

"And the more the time," pursued the neighbour, "the more you've favoured and humoured her, John, 'till she's got to be a burden to herself, and everybody else."

"Not to me," said her father, falling to his work again. "Not to me."

Florence could feel — who better? — how truly he spoke. She drew a little closer to him, and would have been glad to touch his rugged hand, and thank him for his goodness to the miserable object that he looked upon with eyes so different from any other man's.

"Who would favour my poor girl — to call it favouring — if I didn't?" said the father.

"Aye, aye," cried the neighbour. "In reason, John. But you! You rob yourself to give to her. You bind yourself hand and foot on her account. You make your life miserable along of her. And what does *she* care! You don't believe she knows it?"

The father lifted up his head again, and whistled to her. Martha made the same impatient gesture with her crouching shoulders, in reply; and he was glad and happy.

"Only for that, Miss," said the neighbour, with a smile, in which there was more of secret sympathy than he expressed; "only to get that, he never lets her out of his sight!"

"Because the day 'll come, and has been coming a long while," observed the other, bending low over his work, "when to get half as much from that unfort'nate child of mine — to get

the trembling of a finger, or the waving of a hair — would be to raise the dead.”

Florence softly put some money near his hand on the old boat, and left him.

And now Florence began to think, if she were to fall ill, if she were to fade like her dear brother, would he then know that she had loved him; would she then grow dear to him; would he come to her bedside, when she was weak and dim of sight, and take her into his embrace, and cancel all the past? Would he so forgive her, in that changed condition, for not having been able to lay open her childish heart to him, as to make it easy to relate with what emotions she had gone out of his room that night; what she had meant to say if she had had the courage; and how she had endeavoured, afterwards, to learn the way she never knew in infancy?

Yes, she thought if she were dying, he would relent. She thought, that if she lay, serene and not unwilling to depart, upon the bed that was curtained round with recollections of their darling boy, he would be touched home, and would say, “Dear Florence, live for me, and we will love each other as we might have done, and be as happy as we might have been these many years!” She thought that if she heard such words from him, and had her arms clasped round him, she could answer with a smile, “It is too late for anything but this; I never could be happier, dear father!” and so leave him, with a blessing on her lips.

The golden water she remembered on the wall, appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand in hand; and often when she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet, she thought with awful wonder, but not terror, of that river which her brother had so often said was bearing him away.

The father and his sick daughter were yet fresh in Florence’s mind, and, indeed, that incident was not a week old, when Sir

Barnet and his lady going out walking in the lanes one afternoon, proposed to her to bear them company. Florence readily consenting, Lady Skettles ordered out young Barnet as a matter of course. For nothing delighted Lady Skettles so much, as beholding her eldest son with Florence on his arm.

Barnet, to say the truth, appeared to entertain an opposite sentiment on the subject, and on such occasions frequently expressed himself audibly, though indefinitely, in reference to "a parcel of girls." As it was not easy to ruffle her sweet temper, however, Florence generally reconciled the young gentleman to his fate after a few minutes, and they strolled on amicably: Lady Skettles and Sir Barnet following, in a state of perfect complacency and high gratification.

This was the order of procedure on the afternoon in question; and Florence had almost succeeded in overruling the present objections of Skettles junior to his destiny, when a gentleman on horseback came riding by, looked at them earnestly as he passed, drew in his rein, wheeled round, and came riding back again, hat in hand.

The gentleman had looked particularly at Florence; and when the little party stopped, on his riding back, he bowed to her before saluting Sir Barnet and his lady. Florence had no remembrance of having ever seen him, but she started involuntarily when he came near her, and drew back.

"My horse is perfectly quiet, I assure you," said the gentleman.

It was not that, but something in the gentleman himself — Florence could not have said what — that made her recoil as if she had been stung.

"I have the honour to address Miss Dombey, I believe?" said the gentleman, with a most persuasive smile. On Florence inclining her head, he added, "My name is Carker. I can

hardly hope to be remembered by Miss Dombey, except by name. Carker."

Florence, sensible of a strange inclination to shiver, though the day was hot, presented him to her host and hostess; by whom he was very graciously received.

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Carker, "a thousand times! But I am going down to-morrow morning to Mr. Dombey, at Leamington, and if Miss Dombey can intrust me with any commission, need I say how *very* happy I shall be?"

Sir Barnet immediately divining that Florence would desire to write a letter to her father, proposed to return, and besought Mr. Carker to come home and dine in his riding gear. Mr. Carker had the misfortune to be engaged to dinner, but if Miss Dombey wished to write, nothing would delight him more than to accompany them back, and to be her faithful slave in waiting as long as she pleased. As he said this with his widest smile, and bent down close to her to pat his horse's neck, Florence, meeting his eyes, saw, rather than heard him say, "There is no news of the ship!"

Confused, frightened, shrinking from him, and not even sure that he had said those words, for he seemed to have shown them to her in some extraordinary manner through his smile, instead of uttering them, Florence faintly said that she was obliged to him, but she would not write; she had nothing to say.

"Nothing to send, Miss Dombey?" said the man of teeth.

"Nothing," said Florence, "but my — but my dear love — if you please."

Disturbed as Florence was, she raised her eyes to his face with an imploring and expressive look, that plainly besought him, if he knew — which he as plainly did — that any message between her and her father was an uncommon charge, but that one most of all, to spare her. Mr. Carker smiled and bowed low, and being charged by Sir Barnet with the best compliments of

himself and Lady Skettles, took his leave, and rode away: leaving a favourable impression on that worthy couple. Florence was seized with such a shudder as he went, that Sir Barnet, adopting the popular superstition, supposed somebody was passing over her grave. Mr. Carker, turning a corner, on the instant, looked back, and bowed, and disappeared, as if he rode off to the churchyard, straight, to do it.

CHAPTER V.

Strange news of uncle Sol.

CAPTAIN CUTTLE, though no sluggard, did not turn out so early on the morning after he had seen Sol Gills, through the shop-window, writing in the parlour, with the Midshipman upon the counter, and Rob the Grinder making up his bed below it, but that the clocks struck six as he raised himself on his elbow, and took a survey of his little chamber. The Captain's eyes must have done severe duty, if he usually opened them as wide on awaking as he did that morning; and were but roughly rewarded for their vigilance, if he generally rubbed them half as hard. But the occasion was no common one, for Rob the Grinder had certainly never stood in the doorway of Captain Cuttle's bed-room before, and in it he stood then, panting at the Captain, with a flushed and touzled air of Bed about him, that greatly heightened both his colour and expression.

"Holloa!" roared the Captain. "What's the matter?"

Before Rob could stammer a word in answer, Captain Cuttle turned out, all in a heap, and covered the boy's mouth with his hand.

"Steady my lad," said the Captain, "don't ye speak a word to me as yet!"

The Captain, looking at his visitor in great consternation, gently shouldered him into the next room, after laying this in-

junction upon him; and disappearing for a few moments, forthwith returned in the blue suit. Holding up his hand in token of the injunction not yet being taken off, Captain Cuttle walked up to the cupboard, and poured himself out a dram; a counterpart of which he handed to the messenger. The Captain then stood himself up in a corner, against the wall, as if to forestal the possibility of being knocked backwards by the communication that was to be made to him; and having swallowed his liquor, with his eyes fixed on the messenger, and his face as pale as his face could be, requested him to "heave a-head."

"Do you mean, tell you, Captain?" asked Rob, who had been greatly impressed by these precautions.

"Aye!" said the Captain.

"Well, Sir," said Rob, "I aint got much to tell. But look here!"

Rob produced a bundle of keys. The Captain surveyed them, remained in his corner, and surveyed the messenger.

"And look here!" pursued Rob.

The boy produced a sealed packet, which Captain Cuttle stared at as he had stared at the keys.

"When I woke this morning, Captain," said Rob, "which was about a quarter after five, I found these on my pillow. The shop-door was unbolted and unlocked, and Mr. Gills gone."

"Gone!" roared the Captain.

"Flowed, Sir," returned Rob.

The Captain's voice was so tremendous, and he came out of his corner with such way on him, that Rob retreated before him into another corner: holding out the keys and packet, to prevent himself from being run down.

"'For Captain Cuttle,' Sir," cried Rob, "is on the keys, and on the packet too. Upon my word and honour, Captain Cuttle, I don't know anything more about it. I wish I may die if I do! Here's a sitiuation for a lad that's just got a sitiuation,"

cried the unfortunate Grinder, screwing his cuff into his face: "his master bolted with his place, and him blamed for it!"

These lamentations had reference to Captain Cuttle's gaze, or rather glare, which was full of vague suspicions, threatenings, and denunciations. Taking the proffered packet from his hand, the Captain opened it, and read as follows:

"My dear Ned Cuttle. Enclosed is my Will!" The Captain turned it over, with a doubtful look — "and Testament. — Where's the Testament?" said the Captain, instantly impeaching the ill-fated Grinder. "What have you done with that, my lad?"

"I never see it," whimpered Rob. "Don't keep on suspecting an innocent lad, Captain. I never touched the Testament."

Captain Cuttle shook his head, implying that somebody must be made answerable for it; and gravely proceeded:

"Which don't break open for a year, or until you have decisive intelligence of my dear Walter, who is dear to you, Ned, too, I am sure." The Captain paused and shook his head in some emotion; then, as a re-establishment of his dignity in this trying position, looked with exceeding sternness at the Grinder. "If you should never hear of me, or see me more, Ned, remember an old friend as he will remember you to the last — kindly; and at least until the period I have mentioned has expired, keep a home in the old place for Walter. There are no debts, the loan from Dombey's house is paid off, and all my keys I send with this. Keep this quiet, and make no inquiry for me; it is useless. So no more, dear Ned, from your true friend, Solomon Gills." The Captain took a long breath, and then read these words, written below: "The boy Rob, well recommended, as I told you, from Dombey's house. If all else should come to the hammer, take care, Ned, of the little Midshipman."

To convey to posterity any idea of the manner in which the Captain, after turning this letter over and over, and reading it a

score of times, sat down in his chair, and held a court-martial on the subject in his own mind, would require the united genius of all the great men, who, discarding their own untoward days, have determined to go down to posterity, and have never got there. At first the Captain was too much confounded and distressed to think of anything but the letter itself; and even when his thoughts began to glance upon the various attendant facts, they might, perhaps, as well have occupied themselves with their former theme, for any light they reflected on them. In this state of mind, Captain Cuttle having the Grinder before the court, and no one else, found it a great relief to decide, generally, that he was an object of suspicion: which the Captain so clearly expressed in his visage, that Rob remonstrated.

"Oh, don't, Captain!" cried the Grinder. "I wonder how you can! what have I done to be looked at, like that."

"My lad," said Captain Cuttle, "don't you sing out afore you're hurt. And don't you commit yourself, whatever you do."

"I haven't been and committed nothing, Captain!" answered Rob.

"Keep her free, then," said the Captain, impressively, "and ride easy."

With a deep sense of the responsibility imposed upon him, and the necessity of thoroughly fathoming this mysterious affair, as became a man in his relations with the parties, Captain Cuttle resolved to go down and examine the premises, and to keep the Grinder with him. Considering that youth as under arrest at present, the Captain was in some doubt whether it might not be expedient to handcuff him, or tie his ankles together, or attach a weight to his legs, but not being clear as to the legality of such formalities, the Captain decided merely to hold him by the shoulder all the way, and knock him down if he made any objection.

However, he made none, and consequently got to the Instru-

ment-maker's house without being placed under any more stringent restraint. As the shutters were not yet taken down, the Captain's first care was to have the shop opened; and when the daylight was freely admitted, he proceeded, with its aid, to further investigation.

The Captain's first care was to establish himself in a chair in the shop, as President of the solemn tribunal that was sitting within him; and to require Rob to lie down in his bed under the counter, show exactly where he discovered the keys and packet when he awoke, how he found the door when he went to try it, how he started off to Brig Place — cautiously preventing the latter imitation from being carried farther than the threshold — and so on to the end of the chapter. When all this had been done several times, the Captain shook his head and seemed to think the matter had a bad look.

Next, the Captain, with some indistinct idea of finding a body, instituted a strict search over the whole house; groping in the cellars with a lighted candle, thrusting his hook behind doors, bringing his head into violent contact with beams, and covering himself with cobwebs. Mounting up to the old man's bed-room, they found that he had not been in bed on the previous night, but had merely lain down on the coverlet, as was evident from the impression yet remaining there.

"And I think, Captain," said Rob, looking round the room, "that when Mr. Gills was going in and out so often, these last few days, he was taking little things away, piecemeal, not to attract attention."

"Aye!" said the Captain, mysteriously. "Why so, my lad?"

"Why," returned Rob, looking about, "I don't see his shaving tackle. Nor his brushes, Captain. Nor no shirts. Nor yet his shoes."

As each of these articles was mentioned, Captain Cuttle took

particular notice of the corresponding department of the Grinder, lest he should appear to have been in recent use, or should prove to be in present possession thereof. But Rob had no occasion to shave, certainly was not brushed, and wore the clothes he had worn for a long time past, beyond all possibility of mistake.

“And what should you say,” said the Captain — “not committing yourself — about his time of sheering off? Hey?”

“Why, I think, Captain,” returned Rob, “that he must have gone pretty soon after I began to snore.”

“What o’clock was that?” said the Captain, prepared to be very particular about the exact time.

“How can I tell, Captain!” answered Rob. “I only know that I ’m a heavy sleeper at first, and a light one towards morning; and if Mr. Gills had come through the shop near daybreak, though ever so much on tiptoe, I ’m pretty sure I should have heard him shut the door at all events.”

On mature consideration of this evidence, Captain Cuttle began to think that the Instrument-maker must have vanished of his own accord; to which logical conclusion he was assisted by the letter addressed to himself, which, as being unquestionably in the old man’s hand-writing, would seem, with no great forcing, to bear the construction, that he arranged of his own will, to go, and so went. The Captain had next to consider where and why? and as there was no way whatsoever that he saw to the solution of the first difficulty, he confined his meditations to the second.

Remembering the old man’s curious manner, and the farewell he had taken of him: unaccountably fervent at the time, but quite intelligible now: a terrible apprehension strengthened on the Captain, that, overpowered by his anxieties and regrets for Walter, he had been driven to commit suicide. Unequal to the wear and tear of daily life, as he had often professed himself to

be, and shaken as he no doubt was by the uncertainty and deferred hope he had undergone, it seemed no violently strained misgiving, but only too probable.

Free from debt, and with no fear for his personal liberty, or the seizure of his goods, what else but such a state of madness could have hurried him away alone and secretly? As to his carrying some apparel with him, if he had really done so — and they were not even sure of that — he might have done so, the Captain argued, to prevent inquiry, to distract attention from his probable fate, or to ease the very mind that was now revolving all these possibilities. Such, reduced into plain language, and condensed within a small compass, was the final result and substance of Captain Cuttle's deliberations; which took a long time to arrive at this pass, and were, like some more public deliberations, very discursive and disorderly.

Dejected and despondent in the extreme, Captain Cuttle felt it just to release Rob from the arrest in which he had placed him, and to enlarge him, subject to a kind of honourable inspection which he still resolved to exercise; and having hired a man, from Brogley the Broker, to sit in the shop during their absence, the Captain, taking Rob with him, issued forth upon a dismal quest after the mortal remains of Solomon Gills.

Not a station-house, or bone-house, or work-house in the metropolis escaped a visitation from the hard glazed hat. Along the wharves, among the shipping, on the bank-side, up the river, down the river, here, there, everywhere, it went gleaming where men were thickest, like the hero's helmet in an epic battle. For a whole week, the Captain read of all the found and missing people in all the newspapers and handbills, and went forth on expeditions at all hours of the day to identify Solomon Gills, in poor little ship-boys who had fallen overboard, and in tall foreigners with dark beards who had taken poison — “to make sure,” Captain

Cuttle said, "that it warn't him." It is a sure thing that it never was, and that the good Captain had no other satisfaction.

Captain Cuttle at last abandoned these attempts as hopeless, and set himself to consider what was to be done next. After several new perusals of his poor friend's letter, he considered that the maintenance of "a home in the old place for Walter" was the primary duty imposed upon him. Therefore, the Captain's decision was, that he would keep house on the premises of Solomon Gills himself, and would go into the instrument business, and see what came of it.

But as this step involved the relinquishment of his apartments at Mrs. Mac Stinger's, and he knew that resolute woman would never hear of his deserting them, the Captain took the desperate determination of running away.

"Now, look ye here, my lad," said the Captain to Rob, when he had matured this notable scheme, "to-morrow, I shan't be found in this here roadstead till night — not till arter midnight p'raps. But you keep watch till you hear me knock, and the moment you do, turn-to, and open the door."

"Very good, Captain," said Rob.

"You 'll continue to be rated on this here books," pursued the Captain condescendingly, "and I don't say but what you may get promotion, if you and me should pull together with a will. But the moment you hear me knock to-morrow night, whatever time it is, turn-to and show yourself smart with the door."

"I 'll be sure to do it, Captain," replied Rob.

"Because you understand," resumed the Captain, coming back again to enforce this charge upon his mind, "there may be, for anything I can say, a chase; and I might be took while I was waiting, if you didn't show yourself smart with the door."

Rob again assured the Captain that he would be prompt and wakeful; and the Captain having made this prudent arrangement, went home to Mrs. Mac Stinger's for the last time.

The sense the Captain had of its being the last time, and of the awful purpose hidden beneath his blue waistcoat, inspired him with such a mortal dread of Mrs. Mac Stinger, that the sound of that lady's foot downstairs at any time of the day, was sufficient to throw him into a fit of trembling. It fell out, too, that Mrs. Mac Stinger was in a charming temper — mild and placid as a house-lamb; and Captain Cuttle's conscience suffered terrible twinges, when she came up to inquire if she could cook him nothing for his dinner.

"A nice small kidney-pudding now, Cap'en Cuttle," said his landlady: "or a sheep's heart. Don't mind *my* trouble."

"No thank'ee, Ma'am," returned the Captain.

"Have a roast fowl," said Mrs. Mac Stinger, "with a bit of weal stuffing and some egg sauce. Come, Cap'en Cuttle! Give yourself a little treat!"

"No thank'ee, Ma'am," returned the Captain very humbly.

"I'm sure you're out of sorts, and want to be stimulated," said Mrs. Mac Stinger. "Why not have, for once in a way, a bottle of sherry wine?"

"Well Ma'am," rejoined the Captain, "if you'd be so good as take a glass or two, I think I would try that. Would you do me the favour, Ma'am," said the Captain, torn to pieces by his conscience, "to accept a quarter's rent a-head?"

"And why so, Cap'en Cuttle?" retorted Mrs. Mac Stinger — sharply, as the Captain thought.

The Captain was frightened to death. "If you would Ma'am," he said with submission, "it would oblige me. I can't keep my money very well. It pays itself out. I should take it kind if you'd comply."

"Well, Cap'en Cuttle," said the unconscious Mac Stinger,

rubbing her hands, "you can do as you please. It's not for me, with my family, to refuse, no more than it is to ask."

"And would you, Ma'am," said the Captain, taking down the tin canister in which he kept his cash, from the top-shelf of the cupboard, "be so good as offer eighteen-pence a-piece to the little family all round? If you could make it convenient, Ma'am, to pass the word presently for them children to come for'ard, in a body, I should be glad to see 'em."

These innocent Mac Stingers were so many daggers to the Captain's breast, when they appeared in a swarm, and tore at him with the confiding trustfulness he so little deserved. The eye of Alexander Mac Stinger, who had been his favourite, was insupportable to the Captain; the voice of Juliana Mac Stinger, who was the picture of her mother, made a coward of him.

Captain Cuttle kept up appearances, nevertheless, tolerably well, and for an hour or two was very hardly used and roughly handled by the young Mac Stingers: who in their childish frolics, did a little damage also to the glazed hat, by sitting in it, two at a time, as in a nest, and drumming on the inside of the crown with their shoes. At length the Captain sorrowfully dismissed them: taking leave of these cherubs with the poignant remorse and grief of a man who was going to execution.

In the silence of night, the Captain packed up his heavier property in a chest, which he locked, intending to leave it there, in all probability for ever, but on the forlorn chance of one day finding a man sufficiently bold and desperate to come and ask for it. Of his lighter necessaries, the Captain made a bundle; and disposed his plate about his person, ready for flight. At the hour of midnight, when Brig Place was buried in slumber, and Mrs. Mac Stinger was lulled in sweet oblivion, with her infants around her, the guilty Captain, stealing down on tiptoe, in the

dark, opened the door, closed it softly after him, and took to his heels.

Pursued by the image of Mrs. Mac Stinger springing out of bed, and, regardless of costume, following and bringing him back; pursued also by a consciousness of his enormous crime; Captain Cuttle held on at a great pace, and allowed no grass to grow under his feet, between Brig Place and the Instrument Maker's door. It opened when he knocked — for Rob was on the watch — and when it was bolted and locked behind him, Captain Cuttle felt comparatively safe.

“Whew!” cried the Captain, looking round him, “It 's a breather,!”

“Nothing the matter, is there, Captain?” cried the gaping Rob.

“No, no!” said Captain Cuttle, after changing colour, and listening to a passing footstep in the street. “But mind ye, my lad; if any lady, except either of them two as you see t'other day, ever comes and asks for Cap'en Cuttle, be sure to report no person of that name known, nor never heard of here; observe them orders, will you?”

“I'll take care, Captain,” returned Rob.

“You might say — if you liked,” hesitated the Captain, “that you'd read in the paper that a Cap'en of that name was gone to Australia, emigrating, along with a whole ship's complement of people as had all swore never to come back no more.”

Rob nodded his understanding of these instructions; and Captain Cuttle promising to make a man of him if he obeyed orders, dismissed him yawning, to his bed under the counter, and went aloft to the chamber of Solomon Gills.

What the Captain suffered next day, whenever a bonnet passed, or how often he darted out of the shop to elude imaginary Mac Stingers, and sought safety in the attic, cannot be told. But to avoid the fatigues attendant on this means of self-preservation,

the Captain curtained the glass-door of communication between the shop and parlour, on the inside; fitted a key to it from the bunch that had been sent to him; and cut a small hole of espial in the wall. The advantage of this fortification is obvious. On a bonnet appearing, the Captain instantly slipped into his garri-son, locked himself up, and took a secret observation of the enemy. Finding it a false alarm, the Captain instantly slipped out again. And the bonnets in the street were so very numerous, and alarms were so inseparable from their appearance, that the Captain was almost incessantly slipping in and out all day long.

Captain Cuttle found time, however, in the midst of this fatiguing service to inspect the stock; in connexion with which he had the general idea (very laborious to Rob) that too much friction could not be bestowed upon it, and that it could not be made too bright. He also ticketed a few attractive looking articles at a venture, at prices ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds, and exposed them in the window to the great astonishment of the public.

After effecting these improvements, Captain Cuttle, surrounded by the instruments, began to feel scientific: and looked up at the stars at night, through the skylight, when he was smoking his pipe in the little back parlour before going to bed, as if he had established a kind of property in them. As a tradesman in the city, too, he began to have an interest in the Lord Mayor, and the Sheriffs, and in Public Companies; and felt bound to read the quotations of the Funds every day, though he was unable to make out, on any principle of navigation, what the figures meant, and could have very well dispensed with the fractions. Florence, the Captain waited on, with his strange news of Uncle Sol, immediately after taking possession of the Midshipman; but she was away from home. So the Captain sat himself down in his altered station of life, with no company but Rob the Grinder;

and losing count of time, as men do when great changes come upon them, thought musingly of Walter, and of Solomon Gills, and even of Mrs. Mac Stinger herself, as among the things that had been.

CHAPTER VI.

Shadows of the past and future.

“YOUR most obedient, Sir,” said the Major. “Damme, Sir, a friend of my friend Dombey’s, is a friend of mine, and I’m glad to see you!”

“I am infinitely obliged, Carker,” explained Mr. Dombey, “to Major Bagstock, for his company and conversation. Major Bagstock has rendered me great service, Carker.”

Mr. Carker the Manager, hat in hand, just arrived at Leamington, and just introduced to the Major, showed the Major his whole double range of teeth, and trusted he might take the liberty of thanking him with all his heart for having effected so great an improvement in Mr. Dombey’s looks and spirits.

“By Gad, Sir,” said the Major, in reply, “there are no thanks due to me, for it’s a give and take affair. A great creature like our friend Dombey, Sir,” said the Major, lowering his voice, but not lowering it so much as to render it inaudible to that gentleman, “cannot help improving and exalting his friends. He strengthens and invigorates a man, Sir, does Dombey, in his moral nature.”

Mr. Carker snapped at the expression. In his moral nature. Exactly. The very words he had been on the point of suggesting.

“But when my friend Dombey, Sir,” added the Major, “talks to you of Major Bagstock, I must crave leave to set him and you right. He means plain Joe, Sir — Joey B. — Josh.

Bagstock — Joseph — rough and tough Old J., Sir. At your service."

Mr. Carker's excessively friendly inclinations towards the Major, and Mr. Carker's admiration of his roughness, toughness, and plainness, gleamed out of every tooth in Mr. Carker's head.

"And now Sir," said the Major, "you and Dombey have the devil's own amount of business to talk over."

"By no means, Major," observed Mr. Dombey.

"Dombey," said the Major defiantly, "I know better; a man of your mark — the Colossus of commerce — is not to be interrupted. Your moments are precious. We shall meet at dinner-time. In the interval, Old Joseph will be scarce. The dinner hour is a sharp seven, Mr. Carker."

With that, the Major, greatly swollen as to his face, withdrew; but immediately putting in his head at the door again, said:

"I beg your pardon. Dombey, have you any message to 'em?"

Mr. Dombey in some embarrassment, and not without a glance at the courteous keeper of his business confidence, intrusted the Major with his compliments.

"By the Lord, Sir," said the Major, "you must make it something warmer than that, or Old Joe will be far from welcome."

"Regards then, if you will, Major," returned Mr. Dombey.

"Damme, Sir," said the Major, shaking his shoulders and his great cheeks jocularly: "make it something warmer than that."

"What you please then, Major," observed Mr. Dombey.

"Our friend is sly Sir, sly Sir, de-vilish sly," said the Major, staring round the door at Carker. "So is Bagstock." But stopping in the midst of a chuckle, and drawing himself up to

his full height, the Major solemnly exclaimed, as he struck himself on the chest, "Dombey! I envy your feelings. God bless you!" and withdrew.

"You must have found the gentleman a great resource," said Carker, following him with his teeth.

"Very great indeed," said Mr. Dombey.

"He has friends here, no doubt," pursued Carker. "I perceive, from what he has said, that you go into society here. Do you know," smiling horribly, "I am so very glad that you go into society!"

Mr. Dombey acknowledged this display of interest on the part of his second in command, by twirling his watch-chain, and slightly moving his head.

"You were formed for society," said Carker. "Of all the men I know, you are the best adapted, by nature, and by position, for society. Do you know I have been frequently amazed that you should have held it at arm's length so long!"

"I have had my reasons, Carker. I have been alone, and indifferent to it. But you have great social qualifications yourself, and are the more likely to have been surprised."

"Oh! *I!*" returned the other, with ready self-disparagement. "It's quite another matter in the case of a man like me. I don't come into comparison with *you*."

Mr. Dombey put his hand to his neckcloth, settled his chin in it, coughed, and stood looking at his faithful friend and servant for a few moments in silence.

"I shall have the pleasure, Carker," said Mr. Dombey at length: making as if he swallowed something a little too large for his throat: "to present you to my — to the Major's friends. Highly agreeable people."

"Ladies among them, I presume?" insinuated the smooth Manager.

"They are all — that is to say, they are both — ladies," replied Mr. Dombey.

"Only two?" smiled Carker.

"They are only two. I have confined my visits to their residence, and have made no other acquaintance here."

"Sisters, perhaps?" quoth Carker.

"Mother and daughter," replied Mr. Dombey.

As Mr. Dombey dropped his eyes, and adjusted his neckcloth again, the smiling face of Mr. Carker the Manager became in a moment, and without any stage of transition, transformed into a most intent and frowning face, scanning his closely, and with an ugly sneer. As Mr. Dombey raised his eyes, it changed back, no less quickly, to its old expression, and showed him every gum of which it stood possessed.

"You are very kind," said Carker. "I shall be delighted to know them. Speaking of daughters, I have seen Miss Dombey."

There was a sudden rush of blood to Mr. Dombey's face.

"I took the liberty of waiting on her," said Carker, "to inquire if she could charge me with any little commission. I am not so fortunate as to be the bearer of any but her — but her dear love."

Wolf's face that it was then, with even the hot tongue revealing itself through the stretched mouth, as the eyes encountered Mr. Dombey's!

"What business intelligence is there?" inquired the latter gentleman, after a silence, during which Mr. Carker had produced some memoranda and other papers.

"There is very little," returned Carker. "Upon the whole we have not had our usual good fortune of late, but that is of little moment to you. At Lloyd's, they give up the Son and Heir for lost. Well, she was insured, from her keel to her masthead."

“Carker,” said Mr. Dombey, taking a chair near him, “I cannot say that young man, Gay, ever impressed me favourably —”

“Nor me,” interposed the Manager.

“But I wish,” said Mr. Dombey, without heeding the interruption, “he had never gone on board that ship. I wish he had never been sent out.”

“It is a pity you didn’t say so, in good time, is it not?” retorted Carker, coolly. “However, I think it’s all for the best. I really think it’s all for the best. Did I mention that there was something like a little confidence between Miss Dombey and myself?”

“No,” said Mr. Dombey, sternly.

“I have no doubt,” returned Mr. Carker, after an impressive pause, “that wherever Gay is, he is much better where he is, than at home here. If I were, or could be, in your place, I should be satisfied of that. I am quite satisfied of it myself. Miss Dombey is confiding and young — perhaps hardly proud enough, for your daughter — if she have a fault. Not that that is much though, I am sure. Will you check these balances with me?”

Mr. Dombey leaned back in his chair, instead of bending over the papers that were laid before him, and looked the Manager steadily in the face. The Manager, with his eyelids slightly raised, affected to be glancing at his figures, and to await the leisure of his principal. He showed that he affected this, as if from great delicacy, and with a design to spare Mr. Dombey’s feelings; and the latter, as he looked at him, was cognizant of his intended consideration, and felt that but for it, this confidential Carker would have said a great deal more, which he, Mr. Dombey, was too proud to ask for. It was his way in business, often. Little by little, Mr. Dombey’s gaze relaxed, and his attention became diverted to the papers before him; but while busy

with the occupation they afforded him, he frequently stopped, and looked at Mr. Carker again. Whenever he did so, Mr. Carker was demonstrative, as before, in his delicacy, and impressed it on his great chief more and more.

While they were thus engaged; and under the skilful culture of the Manager, angry thoughts in reference to poor Florence brooded and bred in Mr. Dombey's breast, usurping the place of the cold dislike that generally reigned there; Major Bagstock, much admired by the old ladies of Leamington, and followed by the Native, carrying the usual amount of light baggage, straddled along the shady side of the way, to make a morning call on Mrs. Skewton. It being mid-day when the Major reached the bower of Cleopatra, he had the good fortune to find his Princess on her usual sofa, languishing over a cup of coffee, with the room so darkened and shaded for her more luxurious repose, that Withers, who was in attendance on her, loomed like a phantom page.

"What insupportable creature is this, coming in!" said Mrs. Skewton. "I cannot bear it. Go away, whoever you are!"

"You have not the heart to banish J. B., Ma'am!" said the Major, halting midway, to remonstrate, with his cane over his shoulder.

"Oh it's you, is it? On second thoughts, you may enter," observed Cleopatra.

The Major entered accordingly, and advancing to the sofa pressed her charming hand to his lips.

"Sit down," said Cleopatra, listlessly waving her fan, "a long way off. Don't come too near me, for I am frightfully faint and sensitive this morning, and you smell of the Sun. You are absolutely tropical."

"By George, Ma'am," said the Major, "the time has been when Joseph Bagstock has been grilled and blistered by the Sun;

the time was, when he was forced, Ma'am, into such full blow, by high hothouse heat in the West Indies, that he was known as the Flower. A man never heard of Bagstock, Ma'am, in those days; he heard of the Flower — the Flower of Our's. The Flower may have faded, more or less, Ma'am," observed the Major, dropping into a much nearer chair than had been indicated by his cruel Divinity, "but it is a tough plant yet, and constant as the evergreen."

Here the Major, under cover of the dark room, shut up one eye, rolled his head like a Harlequin, and, in his great self-satisfaction, perhaps went nearer to the confines of apoplexy than he had ever gone before.

"Where is Mrs. Granger?" inquired Cleopatra of her page.

Withers believed she was in her own room.

"Very well," said Mrs. Skewton. "Go away, and shut the door. I am engaged."

As Withers disappeared, Mrs. Skewton turned her head languidly towards the Major, without otherwise moving, and asked him how his friend was.

"Dombey, Ma'am," returned the Major, with a facetious gurgling in his throat, "is as well as a man in his condition *can* be. His condition is a desperate one, Ma'am. He is touched, is Dombey! Touched!" cried the Major. "He is bayoneted through the body."

Cleopatra cast a sharp look at the Major, that contrasted forcibly with the affected drawl in which she presently said:

"Major Bagstock, although I know but little of the world, — nor can I really regret my inexperience, for I fear it is a false place: full of withering conventionalities: where Nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard, — I cannot misunderstand your meaning. There is an allusion to Edith — to my extremely dear child," said

Mrs. Skewton, tracing the outline of her eyebrows with her forefinger, "in your words, to which the tenderest of chords vibrates excessively."

"Bluntness, Ma'am," returned the Major, "has ever been the characteristic of the Bagstock breed. You are right. Joe admits it."

"And that allusion," pursued Cleopatra, "would involve one of the most — if not positively *the* most — touching, and thrilling, and sacred emotions of which our sadly-fallen nature is susceptible, I conceive."

The Major laid his hand upon his lips, and wafted a kiss to Cleopatra, as if to identify the emotion in question.

"I feel that I am weak. I feel that I am wanting in that energy, which should sustain a mama: not to say a parent: on such a subject," said Mrs. Skewton, trimming her lips with the laced edge of her pocket-handkerchief; "but I can hardly approach a topic so excessively momentous to my dearest Edith without a feeling of faintness. Nevertheless, bad man, as you have boldly remarked upon it, and as it has occasioned me great anguish:" Mrs. Skewton touched her left side with her fan: "I will not shrink from my duty."

The Major, under cover of the dimness, swelled, and swelled, and rolled his purple face about, and winked his lobster eye, until he fell into a fit of wheezing, which obliged him to rise and take a turn or two about the room, before his fair friend could proceed.

"Mr. Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, when she at length resumed, "was obliging enough, now many weeks ago, to do us the honour of visiting us here; in company, my dear Major, with yourself. I acknowledge — let me be open — that it is my failing to be the creature of impulse, and to wear my heart, as it were, outside. I know my failing full well. My enemy cannot know it better. But I am not penitent; I would rather not be frozen by

the heartless world, and am content to bear this imputation justly."

Mrs. Skewton arranged her tucker, pinched her wiry throat to give it a soft surface, and went on, with great complacency.

"It gave me (my dearest Edith too, I am sure) infinite pleasure to receive Mr. Dombey. As a friend of yours, my dear Major, we were naturally disposed to be prepossessed in his favour; and I fancied that I observed an amount of Heart in Mr. Dombey, that was excessively refreshing."

"There is devilish little heart in Dombey now, Ma'am," said the Major.

"Wretched man!" cried Mrs. Skewton, looking at him languidly, "pray be silent."

"J. B. is dumb, Ma'am," said the Major.

"Mr. Dombey," pursued Cleopatra, smoothing the rosy hue upon her cheeks, "accordingly repeated his visit; and possibly finding some attraction in the simplicity and primitiveness of our tastes — for there is always a charm in nature — it is so very sweet — became one of our little circle every evening. Little did I think of the awful responsibility into which I plunged when I encouraged Mr. Dombey — to —"

"To beat up these quarters, Ma'am," suggested Major Bagstock.

"Coarse person!" said Mrs. Skewton, "you anticipate my meaning, though in odious language."

Here Mrs. Skewton rested her elbow on the little table at her side, and suffering her wrist to droop in what she considered a graceful and becoming manner, dangled her fan to and fro, and lazily admired her hand while speaking.

"The agony I have endured," she said, mincingly, "as the truth has by degrees dawned upon me, has been too exceedingly terrific to dilate upon. My whole existence is bound up in my sweetest Edith; and to see her change from day to day — my

beautiful pet, who has positively garnered up her heart since the death of that most delightful creature, Granger — is the most affecting thing in the world.”

Mrs. Skewton's world was not a very trying one, if one might judge of it by the influence of its most affecting circumstance upon her; but this by the way.

“Edith,” simpered Mrs. Skewton, “who is the perfect pearl of my life, is said to resemble me. I believe we *are* alike.”

“There is one man in the world who never will admit that any one resembles you, Ma'am,” said the Major; “and that man's name is Old Joe Bagstock.”

Cleopatra made as if she would brain the flatterer with her fan, but relenting, smiled upon him and proceeded:

“If my charming girl inherits any advantages from me, wicked one!”: the Major was the wicked one: “she inherits also my foolish nature. She has great force of character — mine has been said to be immense, though I don't believe it — but once moved, she is susceptible and sensitive to the last extent. What are my feelings when I see her pining! They destroy me.”

The Major advancing his double chin, and pursing up his blue lips into a soothing expression, affected the profoundest sympathy.

“The confidence,” said Mrs. Skewton, “that has subsisted between us — the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment — is touching to think of. We have been more like sisters than mama and child.”

“J. B.'s own sentiment,” observed the Major, “expressed by J. B. fifty thousand times!”

“Do not interrupt, rude man!” said Cleopatra. “What are my feelings, then, when I find that there is one subject avoided by us! That there is a what's his name — a gulf — opened between us. That my own artless Edith is changed to me! They are of the most poignant description, of course.”

The Major left his chair, and took one nearer to the little table.

"From day to day I see this, my dear Major," proceeded Mrs. Skewton. "From day to day I feel this. From hour to hour I reproach myself for that excess of faith and trustfulness which has led to such distressing consequences; and almost from minute to minute, I hope that Mr. Dombey may explain himself, and relieve the torture I undergo, which is extremely wearing. But nothing happens, my dear Major; I am the slave of remorse — take care of the coffee cup: you are so very awkward — my darling Edith is an altered being; and I really don't see what is to be done, or what good creature I can advise with."

Major Bagstock, encouraged perhaps by the softened and confidential tone into which Mrs. Skewton, after several times lapsing into it for a moment, seemed now to have subsided for good: stretched out his hand across the little table, and said with a leer,

"Advise with Joe, Ma'am."

"Then, you aggravating monster," said Cleopatra, giving one hand to the Major, and tapping his knuckles with her fan, which she held in the other: "why don't you talk to me? You know what I mean. Why don't you tell me something to the purpose?"

The Major laughed, and kissed the hand she had bestowed upon him, and laughed again, immensely.

"Is there as much Heart in Mr. Dombey as I gave him credit for?" languished Cleopatra tenderly. "Do you think he is in earnest, my dear Major? Would you recommend his being spoken to, or his being left alone? Now tell me, like a dear man, what you would advise."

"Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma'am?" chuckled the Major hoarsely.

"Mysterious creature!" returned Cleopatra, bringing her fan to bear upon the Major's nose. "How can *we* marry him?"

"Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma'am, I say?" chuckled the Major again.

Mrs. Skewton returned no answer in words, but smiled upon the Major with so much archness and vivacity, that that gallant officer considering himself challenged, would have imprinted a kiss on her exceedingly red lips, but for her interposing the fan with a very winning and juvenile dexterity. It might have been in modesty; it might have been in apprehension of some danger to their bloom.

"Dombey, Ma'am," said the Major, "is a great catch."

"Oh, mercenary wretch!" cried Cleopatra, with a little shriek, "I am shocked."

"And Dombey, Ma'am," pursued the Major, thrusting forward his head, and distending his eyes, "is in earnest. Joseph says it; Bagstock knows it; J. B. keeps him to the mark. Leave Dombey to himself, Ma'am. Dombey is safe, Ma'am. Do as you have done; do no more; and trust to J. B. for the end."

"You really think so, my dear Major?" returned Cleopatra, who had eyed him very cautiously, and very searchingly, in spite of her listless bearing.

"Sure of it, Ma'am," rejoined the Major. "Cleopatra the peerless, and her Antony Bagstock, will often speak of this, triumphantly, when sharing the elegance and wealth of Edith Dombey's establishment. Dombey's right-hand man, Ma'am," said the Major, stopping abruptly in a chuckle, and becoming serious, "has arrived."

"This morning?" said Cleopatra.

"This morning, Ma'am," returned the Major. "And Dombey's anxiety for his arrival, Ma'am, is to be referred — take J. B.'s word for this; for Joe is de-vilish sly" — the Major tapped his nose, and screwed up one of his eyes tight: which did not

enhance his native beauty — “to his desire that what is in the wind should become known to him, without Dombey’s telling and consulting him. For Dombey is as proud, Ma’am,” said the Major, “as Lucifer.”

“A charming quality,” lisped Mrs. Skewton; “reminding one of dearest Edith.”

“Well, Ma’am,” said the Major. “I have thrown out hints already, und the right-hand man understands ’em; and I’ll throw out more, before the day is done. Dombey projected this morning a ride to Warwick Castle, and to Kenilworth, to-morrow, to be preceded by a breakfast with us. I undertook the delivery of this invitation. Will you honour us so far, Ma’am?” said the Major, swelling with shortness of breath and slyness, as he produced a note, addressed to the Honourable Mrs. Skewton, by favour of Major Bagstock, wherein her’s ever faithfully, Paul Dombey, besought her and her amiable and accomplished daughter to consent to the proposed excursion; and in a postscript unto which, the same ever faithfully Paul Dombey entreated to be recalled to the remembrance of Mrs. Granger.

“Hush!” said Cleopatra, suddenly, “Edith!”

The loving mother can scarcely be described as resuming her insipid and affected air when she made this exclamation; for she had never cast it off; nor was it likely that she ever would or could, in any other place than in the grave. But hurriedly dismissing whatever shadow of earnestness, or faint confession of a purpose, laudable or wicked, that her face, or voice, or manner, had, for the moment, betrayed, she lounged upon the couch, her most insipid and most languid self again, as Edith entered the room.

Edith; so beautiful and stately, but so cold and so repelling. Who, slightly acknowledging the presence of Major Bagstock, and directing a keen glance at her mother, drew back the curtain from a window, and sat down there, looking out.

"My dearest Edith," said Mrs. Skewton, "where on earth have you been? I have wanted you, my love, most sadly."

"You said you were engaged, and I stayed away," she answered, without turning her head.

"It was cruel to Old Joe, Ma'am," said the Major in his gallantry.

"It was very cruel, I know," she said, still looking out — and said with such calm disdain, that the Major was discomfited, and could think of nothing in reply.

"Major Bagstock, my darling Edith," drawled her mother, "who is generally the most useless and disagreeable creature in the world: as you know —"

"It is surely not worth while, Mama," said Edith, looking round, "to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other."

The quiet scorn that sat upon her handsome face — a scorn that evidently lighted on herself, no less than them — was so intense and deep, that her mother's simper, for the instant, though of a hardy constitution, drooped before it.

"My darling girl," she began again.

"Not woman yet?" said Edith, with a smile.

"How very odd you are to-day, my dear! Pray let me say, my love, that Major Bagstock has brought the kindest of notes from Mr. Dombey, proposing that we should breakfast with him to-morrow, and ride to Warwick and Kenilworth. Will you go, Edith?"

"Will I go!" she repeated, turning very red, and breathing quickly as she looked round at her mother.

"I knew you would, my own," observed the latter, carelessly. "It is, as you say, quite a form to ask. Here is Mr. Dombey's letter, Edith."

"Thank you. I have no desire to read it," was her answer.

"Then perhaps I had better answer it myself," said Mrs.

Skewton, "though I had thought of asking *you* to be my secretary, darling." As Edith made no movement, and no answer, Mrs. Skewton begged the Major to wheel her little table nearer, and to set open the desk it contained, and to take out pen and paper for her; all which congenial offices of gallantry the Major discharged, with much submission and devotion.

"Your regards, Edith, my dear?" said Mrs. Skewton, pausing, pen in hand, at the postscript.

"What you will, Mama," she answered, without turning her head, and with supreme indifference.

Mrs. Skewton wrote what she would, without seeking for any more explicit directions, and handed her letter to the Major, who receiving it as a precious charge, made a show of laying it near his heart, but was fain to put it in the pocket of his pantaloons on account of the insecurity of his waistcoat. The Major then took a very polished and chivalrous farewell of both ladies, which the elder one acknowledged in her usual manner, while the younger, sitting with her face addressed to the window, bent her head so slightly that it would have been a greater compliment to the Major to have made no sign at all, and to have left him to infer that he had not been heard or thought of.

"As to alteration in her, Sir," mused the Major on his way back; on which expedition — the afternoon being sunny and hot — he ordered the Native and the light baggage to the front, and walked in the shadow of that expatriated prince: "as to alteration, Sir, and pining, and so forth, that won't go down with Joseph Bagstock. None of that, Sir. It won't do here. But as to there being something of a division between 'em — or a gulf as the mother calls it — damme, Sir, that seems true enough. And it's odd enough! Well, Sir!" panted the Major, "Edith Granger and Dombey are well matched; let 'em fight it out! Bagstock backs the winner!"

The Major, by saying these latter words aloud, in the vigour

of his thoughts, caused the unhappy Native to stop, and turn round, in the belief that he was personally addressed. Exasperated to the last degree by this act of insubordination, the Major (though he was swelling with enjoyment of his own humour, at the moment of its occurrence) instantly thrust his cane among the Native's ribs, and continued to stir him up, at short intervals, all the way to the Hotel.

Nor was the Major less exasperated as he dressed for dinner, during which operation the dark servant underwent the pelting of a shower of miscellaneous objects, varying in size from a boot to a hairbrush, and including everything that came within his master's reach. For the Major plumed himself on having the Native in a perfect state of drill, and visited the least departure from strict discipline with this kind of fatigue duty. Add to this, that he maintained the Native about his person as a counter-irritant against the gout, and all other vexations, mental as well as bodily; and the Native would appear to have earned his pay — which was not large.

At length, the Major having disposed of all the missiles that were convenient to his hand, and having called the Native so many new names as must have given him great occasion to marvel at the resources of the English language, submitted to have his cravat put on; and being dressed, and finding himself in a brisk flow of spirits after this exercise, went down stairs to enliven "Dombey" and his right-hand man.

Dombey was not yet in the room, but the right-hand man was there, and his dental treasures were, as usual, ready for the Major.

"Well, Sir!" said the Major. "How have you passed the time since I had the happiness of meeting you? Have you walked at all?"

"A saunter of barely half an hour's duration," returned Car-ker. "We have been so much occupied."

“Business, eh?” said the Major.

“A variety of little matters necessary to be gone through,” replied Carker. “But do you know — this is quite unusual with me, educated in a distrustful school, and who am not generally disposed to be communicative,” he said, breaking off, and speaking in a charming tone of frankness — “but I feel quite confidential with you, Major Bagstock.”

“You do me honour, Sir,” returned the Major. “You may be.”

“Do you know then,” pursued Carker, “that I have not found my friend — *our* friend, I ought rather to call him —”

“Meaning Dombey, Sir?” cried the Major. “You see me, Mr. Carker, standing here! J. B.?”

He was puffy enough to see, and blue enough; and Mr. Carker intimated that he had that pleasure.

“Then you see a man, Sir, who would go through fire and water to serve Dombey,” returned Major Bagstock.

Mr. Carker smiled, and said he was sure of it. “Do you know, Major,” he proceeded: “to resume where I left off: that I have not found our friend so attentive to business to-day, as usual?”

“No?” observed the delighted Major.

“I have found him a little abstracted, and with his attention disposed to wander,” said Carker.

“By Jove, Sir,” cried the Major, “there’s a lady in the case.”

“Indeed, I begin to believe there really is,” returned Carker. “I thought you might be jesting when you seemed to hint at it; for I know you military men —”

The Major gave the horse’s cough, and shook his head and shoulders, as much as to say, “Well! we *are* gay dogs, there’s no denying.” He then seized Mr. Carker by the button-hole, and with starting eyes whispered in his ear, that she was a woman of

extraordinary charms, Sir. That she was a young widow, Sir. That she was of a fine family, Sir. That Dombey was over head and ears in love with her, Sir, and that it would be a good match on both sides; for she had beauty, blood, and talent, and Dombey had fortune; and what more could any couple have? Hearing Mr. Dombey's footstep without, the Major cut himself short by saying, that Mr. Carker would see her to-morrow morning, and would judge for himself; and between his mental excitement, and the exertion of saying all this in wheezy whispers, the Major sat gurgling in the throat and watering at the eyes, until dinner was ready.

The Major, like some other noble animals, exhibited himself to great advantage at feeding time. On this occasion, he shone resplendent at one end of the table, supported by the milder lustre of Mr. Dombey at the other; while Carker on one side lent his ray to either light, or suffered it to merge into both, as occasion arose.

During the first course or two, the Major was usually grave; for the Native, in obedience to general orders, secretly issued, collected every sauce and cruet round him, and gave him a great deal to do, in taking out the stoppers, and mixing up the contents in his plate. Besides which, the Native had private zests and flavours on a side-table, with which the Major daily scorched himself; to say nothing of strange machines out of which he spirted unknown liquids into the Major's drink. But on this occasion, Major Bagstock, even amidst these many occupations, found time to be social; and his sociality consisted in excessive slyness for the behoof of Mr. Carker, and the betrayal of Mr. Dombey's state of mind.

"Dombey," said the Major, "you don't eat; what 's the matter?"

"Thank you," returned that gentleman, "I am doing very well; I have no great appetite to-day."

"Why, Dombey, what 's become of it?" asked the Major. "Where 's it gone? You haven't left it with our friends, I 'll swear, for I can answer for their having none to-day at luncheon. I can answer for one of 'em, at least; I won't say which."

Then the Major winked at Carker, and became so frightfully sly, that his dark attendant was obliged to pat him on the back, without orders, or he would probably have disappeared under the table.

In a later stage of the dinner: that is to say, when the Native stood at the Major's elbow ready to serve the first bottle of champagne: the Major became still slyer.

"Fill this to the brim, you scoundrel," said the Major, holding up his glass. "Fill Mr. Carker's to the brim too. And Mr. Dombey's too. By Gad, gentlemen," said the Major, winking at his new friend, while Mr. Dombey looked into his plate with a conscious air, "we 'll consecrate this glass of wine to a Divinity whom Joe is proud to know, and at a distance humbly and reverently to admire. Edith," said the Major, "is her name; angelic Edith!"

"To angelic Edith!" cried the smiling Carker.

"Edith, by all means," said Mr. Dombey.

The entrance of the waiters with new dishes caused the Major to be slyer yet, but in a more serious vein. "For though, among ourselves, Joe Bagstock mingles jest and earnest on this subject, Sir," said the Major, laying his finger on his lips, and speaking half apart to Carker, "he holds that name too sacred to be made the property of these fellows, or of any fellows. Not a word, Sir, while they are here!"

This was respectful and becoming on the Major's part, and Mr. Dombey plainly felt it so. Although embarrassed in his own frigid way, by the Major's allusions, Mr. Dombey had no objection to such rallying, it was clear, but rather courted it. Perhaps the Major had been pretty near the truth, when he had divined

that morning that the great man who was too haughty formally to consult with, or confide in his prime minister, on such a matter, yet wished him to be fully possessed of it. Let this be how it may, he often glanced at Mr. Carker while the Major plied his light artillery, and seemed watchful of its effect upon him.

But the Major, having secured an attentive listener, and a smiler who had not his match in all the world — “in short, a devilish intelligent and agreeable fellow,” as he often afterwards declared — was not going to let him off with a little slyness personal to Mr. Dombey. Therefore, on the removal of the cloth, the Major developed himself as a choice spirit in the broader and more comprehensive range of narrating regimental stories, and cracking regimental jokes, which he did with such prodigal exuberance, that Carker was (or feigned to be) quite exhausted with laughter and admiration: while Mr. Dombey looked on over his starched cravat, like the Major’s proprietor, or like a stately showman who was glad to see his bear dancing well.

When the Major was too hoarse with meat and drink, and the display of his social powers, to render himself intelligible any longer, they adjourned to coffee. After which, the Major inquired of Mr. Carker the Manager, with little apparent hope of an answer in the affirmative, if he played picquet.

“Yes, I play picquet a little,” said Mr. Carker.

“Backgammon, perhaps?” observed the Major, hesitating.

“Yes, I play backgammon a little, too,” replied the man of teeth.

“Carker plays at all games, I believe,” said Mr. Dombey, laying himself on a sofa like a man of wood without a hinge or a joint in him; “and plays them well.”

In sooth, he played the two in question, to such perfection, that the Major was astonished, and asked him, at random, if he played chess.

“Yes, I play chess a little,” answered Carker. “I have

sometimes played, and won a game — it's a mere trick — without seeing the board."

"By Gad, Sir!" said the Major, staring, "you're a contrast to Dombey, who plays nothing."

"Oh! *He!*" returned the Manager. "*He* has never had occasion to acquire such little arts. To men like me, they are sometimes useful. As at present, Major Bagstock, when they enable me to take a hand with you."

It might be only the false mouth, so smooth and wide; and yet there seemed to lurk, beneath the humility and subserviency of this short speech, a something like a snarl; and, for a moment, one might have thought that the white teeth were prone to bite the hand they fawned upon. But the Major thought nothing about it; and Mr. Dombey lay meditating, with his eyes half shut, during the whole of the play, which lasted until bed time.

By that time, Mr. Carker, though the winner, had mounted high into the Major's good opinion, insomuch that when he left the Major at his own room before going to bed, the Major, as a special attention, sent the Native — who always rested on a mattress spread upon the ground at his master's door — along the gallery, to light him to his room in state.

There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr. Carker's chamber, and its reflection was, perhaps, a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man, who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor Native at his master's door: who picked his way among them: looking down, maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face — as yet.



CHAPTER VII.

Deeper shadows.

MR. CARKER the Manager rose with the lark, and went out, walking in the summer day. His meditations — and he meditated with contracted brows while he strolled along — hardly seemed to soar as high as the lark, or to mount in that direction; rather they kept close to their nest upon the earth, and looked about, among the dust and worms. But there was not a bird in the air, singing unseen, farther beyond the reach of human eye than Mr. Carker's thoughts. He had his face so perfectly under control, that few could say more, in distinct terms, of its expression, than that it smiled or that it pondered. It pondered now, intently. As the lark rose higher, he sank deeper in thought. As the lark poured out her melody clearer and stronger, he fell into a graver and profounder silence. At length, when the lark came headlong down, with an accumulating stream of song, and dropped among the green wheat near him, rippling in the breath of the morning like a river, he sprang up from his reverie, and looked round with a sudden smile, as courteous and as soft as if he had had numerous observers to propitiate; nor did he relapse, after being thus awakened; but clearing his face, like one who bethought himself that it might otherwise wrinkle and tell tales, went smiling on, as if for practice.

Perhaps with an eye to first impressions, Mr. Carker was very carefully and trimly dressed, that morning. Though always somewhat formal, in his dress, in imitation of the greatman whom he served, he stopped short of the extent of Mr. Dombey's stiffness: at once perhaps because he knew it to be ludicrous, and because in doing so he found another means of expressing his sense of the difference and distance between them. Some people quoted him indeed, in this respect, as a pointed commentary, and

not a flattering one, on his icy patron — but the world is prone to misconstruction, and Mr. Carker was not accountable for its bad propensity.

Clean and florid: with his light complexion, fading as it were, in the sun, and his dainty step enhancing the softness of the turf: Mr. Carker the Manager strolled about meadows, and green lanes, and glided among avenues of trees, until it was time to return to breakfast. Taking a nearer way back, Mr. Carker pursued it, airing his teeth, and said aloud as he did so, “Now to see the second Mrs. Dombey!”

He had strolled beyond the town, and re-entered it by a pleasant walk, where there was a deep shade of leafy trees, and where there were a few benches here and there for those who chose to rest. It not being a place of general resort at any hour, and wearing at that time of the still morning the air of being quite deserted and retired, Mr. Carker had it, or thought he had it, all to himself. So, with the whim of an idle man, to whom there yet remained twenty minutes for reaching a destination easily accessible in ten, Mr. Carker threaded the great boles of the trees, and went passing in and out, before this one and behind that, weaving a chain of footsteps on the dewy ground.

But he found he was mistaken in supposing there was no one in the grove, for as he softly rounded the trunk of one large tree, on which the obdurate bark was knotted and overlapped like the hide of a rhinoceros or some kindred monster of the ancient days before the flood, he saw an unexpected figure sitting on a bench near at hand, about which, in another moment, he would have wound the chain he was making.

It was that of a lady, elegantly dressed and very handsome, whose dark proud eyes were fixed upon the ground, and in whom some passion or struggle was raging. For as she sat looking down, she held a corner of her under lip within her mouth, her bosom heaved, her nostril quivered, her head trembled, indig-

nant tears were on her cheek, and her foot was set upon the moss as though she would have crushed it into nothing. And yet almost the self-same glance that showed him this, showed him the self-same lady rising with a scornful air of weariness and lassitude, and turning away with nothing expressed in face or figure but careless beauty and imperious disdain.

A withered and very ugly old woman, dressed not so much like a gipsey as like any of that medley race of vagabonds who tramp about the country, begging, and stealing, and tinkering, and weaving rushes, by turns, or all together, had been observing the lady, too; for, as she rose, this second figure strangely confronting the first, scrambled up from the ground — out of it, it almost appeared — and stood in the way.

“Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady,” said the old woman, munching with her jaws, as if the Death’s Head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out.

“I can tell it for myself,” was the reply.

“Aye, aye, pretty lady; but not right. You didn’t tell it right when you were sitting there. I see you! Give me a piece of silver, pretty lady, and I’ll tell your fortune true. There’s riches, pretty lady, in your face.”

“I know,” returned the lady, passing her, with a dark smile, and a proud step. “I knew it before.”

“What! You won’t give me nothing?” cried the old woman. “You won’t give me nothing to tell your fortune, pretty lady? How much will you give me *not* to tell it, then? Give me something, or I’ll call it after you!” croaked the old woman, passionately.

Mr. Carker, whom the lady was about to pass close, slinking against his tree as she crossed to gain the path, advanced so as to meet her, and pulling off his hat as she went by, bade the old woman hold her peace. The lady acknowledged his interference with an inclination of the head, and went her way.

"You give me something, then, or I 'll call it after her!" screamed the old woman, throwing up her arms, and pressing forward against his outstretched hand. "Or come," she added, dropping her voice suddenly, looking at him earnestly, and seeming in a moment to forget the object of her wrath, "give me something, or I 'll call it after *you*!"

"After *me*, old lady!" returned the Manager, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Yes," said the woman, steadfast in her scrutiny, and holding out her shrivelled hand. "*I* know!"

"What do you know?" demanded Carker, throwing her a shilling. "Do you know who the handsome lady is?"

Munching like that sailor's wife of yore, who had chesnuts in her lap, and scowling like the witch who asked for some in vain, the old woman picked the shilling up, and going backwards, like a crab, or like a heap of crabs: for her alternately expanding and contracting hands might have represented two of that species, and her creeping face, some half-a-dozen more: crouched on the veinous root of an old tree, pulled out a short black pipe from within the crown of her bonnet, lighted it with a match, and smoked in silence, looking fixedly at her questioner.

Mr. Carker laughed, and turned upon his heel.

"Good!" said the old woman. "One child dead, and one child living: one wife dead, and one wife coming. Go and meet her!"

In spite of himself, the Manager looked round again, and stopped. The old woman, who had not removed her pipe, and was munching and mumbling while she smoked, as if in conversation with an invisible familiar, pointed with her finger in the direction he was going, and laughed.

"What was that you said, Beldamite?" he demanded.

The woman mumbled, and chattered, and smoked, and still pointed before him; but remained silent. Muttering a farewell

that was not complimentary, Mr. Carker pursued his way; but as he turned out of that place, and looked over his shoulder at the root of the old tree, he could yet see the finger pointing before him, and thought he heard the woman screaming, "Go and meet her!"

Preparations for a choice repast were completed, he found, at the hotel; and Mr. Dombey, and the Major, and the breakfast, were awaiting the ladies. Individual constitution has much to do with the development of such facts, no doubt; but in this case, appetite carried it hollow over the tender passion; Mr. Dombey being very cool and collected, and the Major fretting and fuming in a state of violent heat and irritation. At length the door was thrown open by the Native, and, after a pause, occupied by her languishing along the gallery, a very blooming, but not very youthful lady, appeared.

"My dear Mr. Dombey," said the lady, "I am afraid we are late, but Edith has been out already looking for a favourable point of view for a sketch, and kept me waiting for her. Falsest of Majors," giving him her little finger, "how do you do?"

"Mrs. Skewton," said Mr. Dombey, "let me gratify my friend Carker:" Mr. Dombey unconsciously emphasised the word friend, as saying 'no really; I do allow him to take credit for that distinction:' "by presenting him to you. You have heard me mention Mr. Carker."

"I am charmed, I am sure," said Mrs. Skewton, graciously.

Mr. Carker was charmed, of course. Would he have been more charmed on Mr. Dombey's behalf, if Mrs. Skewton had been (as he at first supposed her) the Edith whom they had toasted over night?

"Why, where, for Heaven's sake, is Edith?" exclaimed Mrs. Skewton, looking round. "Still at the door, giving Withers

orders about the mounting of those drawings! My dear Mr. Dombey, will you have the kindness —”

Mr. Dombey was already gone to seek her. Next moment he returned, bearing on his arm the same elegantly dressed and very handsome lady whom Mr. Carker had encountered underneath the trees.

“Carker —” began Mr. Dombey. But their recognition of each other was so manifest, that Mr. Dombey stopped surprised.

“I am obliged to the gentleman,” said Edith, with a stately bend, “for sparing me some annoyance from an importunate beggar just now.”

“I am obliged to my good fortune,” said Mr. Carker, bowing low, “for the opportunity of rendering so slight a service to one whose servant I am proud to be.”

As her eye rested on him for an instant, and then lighted on the ground, he saw in its bright and searching glance a suspicion that he had not come up at the moment of his interference, but had secretly observed her sooner. As he saw that, she saw in *his* eye that her distrust was not without foundation.

“Really,” cried Mrs. Skewton, who had taken this opportunity of inspecting Mr. Carker through her glass, and satisfying herself (as she lisped audibly to the Major) that he was all heart; “really now, this is one of the most enchanting coincidences that I ever heard of. The idea! My dearest Edith, there is such an obvious destiny in it, that really one might almost be induced to cross one’s arm upon one’s frock, and say, like those wicked Turks, there is no What’s-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!”

Edith deigned no revision of this extraordinary quotation from the Koran, but Mr. Dombey felt it necessary to offer a few polite remarks.

“It gives me great pleasure,” said Mr. Dombey, with cum-

brous gallantry, "that a gentleman so nearly connected with myself as Carker is should have had the honour and happiness of rendering the least assistance to Mrs. Granger." Mr. Dombey bowed to her. "But it gives me some pain, and it occasions me to be really envious of Carker;" he unconsciously laid stress on these words, as sensible that they must appear to involve a very surprising proposition; "envious of Carker, that I had not that honour and that happiness myself." Mr. Dombey bowed again. Edith, saving for a curl of her lip, was motionless.

"By the Lord, Sir," cried the Major, bursting into speech at sight of the waiter, who was come to announce breakfast, "it's an extraordinary thing to me that no one can have the honour and happiness of shooting all such beggars through the head without being brought to book for it. But here's an arm for Mrs. Granger if she'll do J. B. the honour to accept it; and the greatest service Joe can render you, Ma'am, just now, is, to lead you in to table!"

With this, the Major gave his arm to Edith; Mr. Dombey led the way with Mrs. Skewton; Mr. Carker went last, smiling on the party.

"I am quite rejoiced, Mr. Carker," said the lady-mother, at breakfast, after another approving survey of him through her glass, "that you have timed your visit so happily, as to go with us to-day. It is the most enchanting expedition!"

"Any expedition would be enchanting in such society," returned Carker; "but I believe it is, in itself, full of interest."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Skewton, with a faded little scream of rapture, "the Castle is charming! — associations of the Middle ages — and all that — which is so truly exquisite. Don't you dote upon the Middle ages, Mr. Carker?"

"Very much, indeed," said Mr. Carker.

"Such charming times!" cried Cleopatra. "So full of Faith! So vigorous and forcible! So picturesque! So perfectly removed

from common-place! Oh dear! If they would only leave us a little more of the poetry of existence in these terrible days!"

Mrs. Skewton was looking sharp after Mr. Dombey all the time she said this, who was looking at Edith: who was listening, but who never lifted up her eyes.

"We are dreadfully real, Mr. Carker," said Mrs. Skewton; "are we not?"

Few people had less reason to complain of their reality than Cleopatra, who had as much that was false about her as could well go to the composition of anybody with a real individual existence. But Mr. Carker commiserated our reality nevertheless, and agreed that we were very hardly used in that regard.

"Pictures at the Castle, quite divine!" said Cleopatra. "I hope you dote upon pictures?"

"I assure you, Mrs. Skewton," said Mr. Dombey, with solemn encouragement of his Manager, "that Carker has a very good taste for pictures; quite a natural power of appreciating them. He is a very creditable artist himself. He will be delighted, I am sure, with Mrs. Granger's taste and skill."

"Damme, Sir!" cried Major Bagstock, "my opinion is, that you're the admirable Carker, and can do anything."

"Oh!" smiled Carker, with humility, "you are much too sanguine, Major Bagstock. I can do very little. But Mr. Dombey is so generous in his estimation of any trivial accomplishment a man like myself may find it almost necessary to acquire, and to which, in his very different sphere, he is far superior, that —" Mr. Carker shrugged his shoulders, deprecating further praise, and said no more.

All this time, Edith never raised her eyes, unless to glance towards her mother when that lady's fervent spirit shone forth in words. But as Carker ceased, she looked at Mr. Dombey for a moment. For a moment only; but with a transient gleam of

scornful wonder on her face, not lost on one observer, who was smiling round the board.

Mr. Dombey caught the dark eye-lash in its descent, and took the opportunity of arresting it.

"You have been to Warwick often, unfortunately?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Several times."

"The visit will be tedious to you, I am afraid."

"Oh no; not at all."

"Ah! You are like your cousin Feenix, my dearest Edith," said Mrs. Skewton. "He has been to Warwick Castle fifty times, if he has been there once; yet if he came to Leamington tomorrow — I wish he would, dear angel! — he would make his fifty-second visit next day."

"We are all enthusiastic, are we not, Mama?" said Edith, with a cold smile.

"Too much so, for our peace, perhaps, my dear," returned her mother; "but we won't complain. Our own emotions are our recompense. If, as your cousin Feenix says, the sword wears out the what's-its-name —"

"The scabbard, perhaps," said Edith.

"Exactly — a little too fast, it is because it is bright and glowing, you know, my dearest love."

Mrs. Skewton heaved a gentle sigh, supposed to cast a shadow on the surface of that dagger of lath, whereof her susceptible bosom was the sheath: and leaning her head on one side, in the Cleopatra manner, looked with pensive affection on her darling child.

Edith had turned her face towards Mr. Dombey when he first addressed her, and had remained in that attitude, while speaking to her mother, and while her mother spoke to her, as though offering him her attention, if he had anything more to say. There was something in the manner of this simple courtesy: almost

defiant, and giving it the character of being rendered on compulsion, or as a matter of traffic to which she was a reluctant party: again not lost upon that same observer who was smiling round the board. It set him thinking of her as he had first seen her, when she had believed herself to be alone among the trees.

Mr. Dombey, having nothing else to say, proposed — the breakfast being now finished, and the Major gorged, like any Boa Constrictor — that they should start. A barouche being in waiting, according to the orders of that gentleman, the two ladies, the Major and himself, took their seats in it; the Native and the wan page mounted the box, Mr. Towlinson being left behind; and Mr. Carker, on horseback, brought up the rear.

Mr. Carker cantered behind the carriage, at the distance of a hundred yards or so, and watched it, during all the ride, as if he were a cat, indeed, and its four occupants, mice. Whether he looked to one side of the road, or to the other — over distant landscape, with its smooth undulations, wind-mills, corn, grass, bean fields, wild-flowers, farm-yards, hayricks, and the spire among the wood — or upwards in the sunny air, where butterflies were sporting round his head, and birds were pouring out their songs — or downward, where the shadows of the branches interlaced, and made a trembling carpet on the road — or onward, where the overhanging trees formed aisles and arches, dim with the softened light that steeped through leaves — one corner of his eye was ever on the formal head of Mr. Dombey, addressed towards him, and the feather in the bonnet, drooping so negligently and scornfully between them: much as he had seen the haughty eyelids droop; not least so, when the face met that now fronting it. Once, and once only, did his wary glance release these objects; and that was, when a leap over a low hedge, and a gallop across a field, enabled him to anticipate the carriage coming by the road, and to be standing ready, at the journey's

end, to hand the ladies out. Then, and but then, he met her glance for an instant in her first surprise; but when he touched her, in alighting, with his soft white hand, it overlooked him altogether as before.

Mrs. Skewton was bent on taking charge of Mr. Carker herself, and showing him the beauties of the Castle. She was determined to have his arm, and the Major's too. It would do that incorrigible creature: who was the most barbarous infidel in point of poetry: good to be in such company. This chance arrangement left Mr. Dombey at liberty to escort Edith: which he did: stalking before them through the apartments with a gentlemanly solemnity.

"Those darling byegone times, Mr. Carker," said Cleopatra, "with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeance, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming! How dreadfully we have degenerated!"

"Yes, we have fallen off deplorably," said Mr. Carker.

The peculiarity of their conversation was, that Mrs. Skewton, in spite of her ecstasies, and Mr. Carker, in spite of his urbanity, were both intent on watching Mr. Dombey and Edith. With all their conversational endowments, they spoke somewhat distractedly, and at random, in consequence.

"We have no Faith left, positively," said Mrs. Skewton, advancing her shrivelled ear; for Mr. Dombey was saying something to Edith. "We have no Faith in the dear old Barons, who were the most delightful creatures — or in the dear old Priests, who were the most warlike of men — or even in the days of that inestimable Queen Bess, upon the wall there, which were so extremely golden. Dear creature! She was all Heart! And that charming father of hers! I hope you dote on Harry the Eighth!"

"I admire him very much," said Carker.

"So bluff!" cried Mrs. Skewton, "wasn't he? So burly. So truly English. Such a picture, too, he makes, with his dear little peepy eyes, and his benevolent chin!"

"Ah, Ma'am!" said Carker, stopping short; "but if you speak of pictures, there's a composition! What gallery in the world can produce the counterpart of that!"

As the smiling gentleman thus spake, he pointed through a doorway to where Mr. Dombey and Edith were standing alone in the centre of another room.

They were not interchanging a word or a look. Standing together, arm in arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them. There was a difference even in the pride of the two, that removed them farther from each other, than if one had been the proudest and the other the humblest specimen of humanity in all creation. He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She, lovely and graceful, in an uncommon degree, but totally regardless of herself and him and everything around, and spurning her own attractions with her haughty brow and lip, as if they were a badge or livery she hated. So unmatched were they, and opposed, so forced and linked together by a chain which adverse hazard and mischance had forged: that fancy might have imagined the pictures on the walls around them, startled by the unnatural conjunction, and observant of it in their several expressions. Grim knights and warriors looked scowling on them. A churchman, with his hand upraised, denounced the mockery of such a couple coming to God's altar. Quiet waters in landscapes, with the sun reflected in their depths, asked, if better means of escape were not at hand, was there no drowning left? Ruins cried, 'Look here, and see what We are, wedded to uncongenial Time!' Animals, opposed by nature, worried one another, as a moral

to them. Loves and Cupids took to flight afraid, and Martyrdom had no such torment in its painted history of suffering.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Skewton was so charmed by the sight to which Mr. Carker invoked her attention, that she could not refrain from saying, half aloud, how sweet, how very full of soul it was! Edith, overhearing, looked round, and flushed indignant scarlet to her hair.

“My dearest Edith knows I was admiring her!” said Cleopatra, tapping her, almost timidly, on the back with her parasol. “Sweet pet!”

Again Mr. Carker saw the strife he had witnessed so unexpectedly among the trees. Again he saw the haughty languor and indifference come over it, and hide it like a cloud.

She did not raise her eyes to him; but with a slight peremptory motion of them, seemed to bid her mother come near. Mrs. Skewton thought it expedient to understand the hint, and advancing quickly, with her two cavaliers, kept near her daughter from that time.

Mr. Carker now, having nothing to distract his attention, began to discourse upon the pictures, and to select the best, and point them out to Mr. Dombey: speaking with his usual familiar recognition of Mr. Dombey's greatness, and rendering homage by adjusting his eye-glass for him, or finding out the right place in his catalogue, or holding his stick, or the like. These services did not so much originate with Mr. Carker, in truth, as with Mr. Dombey himself, who was apt to assert his chieftainship by saying, with subdued authority, and in an easy way — for him “Here, Carker, have the goodness to assist me, will you!” which the smiling gentleman always did, with pleasure.

They made the tour of the pictures, the walls, crow's nest, and so forth; and as they were still one little party, and the Major was rather in the shade: being sleepy during the process of digestion: Mr. Carker became communicative and agreeable.

At first, he addressed himself for the most part to Mrs. Skewton; but as that sensitive lady was in such ecstasies with the works of art, after the first quarter of an hour, that she could do nothing but yawn (they were such perfect inspirations, she observed as a reason for that mark of rapture), he transferred his attentions to Mr. Dombey. Mr. Dombey said little beyond an occasional "Very true, Carker," or "Indeed, Carker," but he tacitly encouraged Carker to proceed, and inwardly approved of his behaviour very much: deeming it as well that somebody should talk, and thinking that his remarks, which were, as one might say, a branch of the parent establishment, might amuse Mrs. Granger. Mr. Carker, who possessed an excellent discretion, never took the liberty of addressing that lady, direct; but she seemed to listen, though she never looked at him; and once or twice, when he was emphatic in his peculiar humility, the twilight smile stole over her face, not as a light, but as a deep black shadow.

Warwick Castle being at length pretty well exhausted, and the Major very much so: to say nothing of Mrs. Skewton, whose peculiar demonstrations of delight had become very frequent indeed: the carriage was again put in requisition, and they rode to several admired points of view in the neighbourhood. Mr. Dombey ceremoniously observed of one of these, that a sketch, however slight, from the fair hand of Mrs. Granger, would be a remembrance to him of that agreeable day: though he wanted no artificial remembrance, he was sure (here Mr. Dombey made another of his bows), which he must always highly value. Withers the lean having Edith's sketch-book under his arm, was immediately called upon by Mrs. Skewton to produce the same: and the carriage stopped, that Edith might make the drawing, which Mr. Dombey was to put away among his treasures.

"But I am afraid I trouble you too much," said Mr. Dombey.

"By no means. Where would you wish it taken from?"

she answered, turning to him with the same enforced attention as before.

Mr. Dombey, with another bow, which cracked the starch in his cravat, would beg to leave that to the Artist.

"I would rather you chose for yourself, said Edith.

"Suppose then," said Mr. Dombey, "we say from here. It appears a good spot for the purpose, or — Carker, what do *you* think?"

There happened to be in the foreground, at some little distance, a grove of trees, not unlike that in which Mr. Carker had made his chain of footsteps in the morning, and with a seat under one tree, greatly resembling, in the general character of its situation, the point where his chain had broken.

"Might I venture to suggest to Mrs. Granger," said Carker, "that that is an interesting — almost a curious — point of view?"

She followed the direction of his riding-whip with her eyes, and raised them quickly to his face. It was the second glance they had exchanged since their introduction; and would have been exactly like the first, but that its expression was plainer.

"Will you like that?" said Edith to Mr. Dombey.

"I shall be charmed," said Mr. Dombey to Edith.

Therefore the carriage was driven to the spot where Mr. Dombey was to be charmed; and Edith, without moving from her seat, and opening her sketch-book with her usual proud indifference, began to sketch.

"My pencils are all pointless," she said, stopping and turning them over.

"Pray allow me," said Mr. Dombey. "Or Carker will do it better, as he understands these things. Carker, have the goodness to see to these pencils for Mrs. Granger."

Mr. Carker rode up close to the carriage-door on Mrs. Granger's side, and letting the rein fall on his horse's neck, took the pencils from her hand with a smile and a bow, and sat in the

saddle leisurely mending them. Having done so, he begged to be allowed to hold them, and to hand them to her as they were required; and thus Mr. Carker, with many commendations of Mrs. Granger's extraordinary skill — especially in trees — remained close at her side, looking over the drawing as she made it. Mr. Dombey in the meantime stood bolt upright in the carriage like a highly respectable ghost, looking on too; while Cleopatra and the Major dallied as two ancient doves might do.

“Are you satisfied with that, or shall I finish it a little more?” said Edith, showing the sketch to Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Dombey begged that it might not be touched; it was perfection.

“It is most extraordinary,” said Carker, bringing every one of his red gums to bear upon his praise. “I was not prepared for anything so beautiful, and so unusual altogether.”

This might have applied to the sketcher no less than to the sketch; but Mr. Carker's manner was openness itself — not as to his mouth alone, but as to his whole spirit. So it continued to be while the drawing was laid aside for Mr. Dombey, and while the sketching materials were put up; then he handed in the pencils (which were received with a distant acknowledgment of his help, but without a look), and tightening his rein, fell back, and followed the carriage again.

Thinking, perhaps, as he rode, that even this trivial sketch had been made and delivered to its owner, as if it had been bargained for and bought. Thinking, perhaps, that although she had assented with such perfect readiness to his request, her haughty face, bent over the drawing, or glancing at the distant objects represented in it, had been the face of a proud woman, engaged in a sordid and miserable transaction. Thinking, perhaps, of such things: but smiling certainly, and while he seemed to look about him freely, in enjoyment of the air and exercise, keeping always that sharp corner of his eye upon the carriage.

A stroll among the haunted ruins of Kenilworth, and more rides to more points of view: most of which, Mrs. Skewton reminded Mr. Dombey, Edith had already sketched, as he had seen in looking over her drawings: brought the day's expedition to a close. Mrs. Skewton and Edith were driven to their own lodgings; Mr. Carker was graciously invited by Cleopatra to return thither with Mr. Dombey and the Major, in the evening, to hear some of Edith's music; and the three gentlemen repaired to their hotel to dinner.

The dinner was the counterpart of yesterday's, except that the Major was twenty-four hours more triumphant and less mysterious. Edith was toasted again. Mr. Dombey was again agreeably embarrassed. And Mr. Carker was full of interest and praise.

There were no other visitors at Mrs. Skewton's. Edith's drawings were strewn about the room, a little more abundantly than usual perhaps; and Withers, the wan page, handed round a little stronger tea. The harp was there; the piano was there; and Edith sang and played. But even the music was paid by Edith to Mr. Dombey's order, as it were, in the same uncompromising way. As thus.

"Edith, my dearest love," said Mrs. Skewton, half an hour after tea, "Mr. Dombey is dying to hear you, I know."

"Mr. Dombey has life enough left to say so for himself, Mama, I have no doubt."

"I shall be immensely obliged," said Mr. Dombey.

"What do you wish?"

"Piano?" hesitated Mr. Dombey.

"Whatever you please. You have only to choose."

Accordingly, she began with the piano. It was the same with the harp; the same with her singing; the same with the selection of the pieces that she sang and played. Such frigid and constrained, yet prompt and pointed acquiescence with the wishes he imposed upon her, and on no one else, was sufficiently remarkable to pene-

trate through all the mysteries of picquet, and impress itself on Mr. Carker's keen attention. Nor did he lose sight of the fact that Mr. Dombey was evidently proud of his power, and liked to show it.

Nevertheless, Mr. Carker played so well — some games with the Major, and some with Cleopatra, whose vigilance of eye in respect of Mr. Dombey and Edith no lynx could have surpassed — that he even heightened his position in the lady-mother's good graces; and when on taking leave he regretted that he would be obliged to return to London next morning, Cleopatra trusted: community of feeling not being met with every day: that it was far from being the last time they would meet.

"I hope so," said Mr. Carker, with an expressive look at the couple in the distance, as he drew towards the door, following the Major. "I think so."

Mr. Dombey, who had taken a stately leave of Edith, bent, or made some approach to a bend, over Cleopatra's couch, and said, in a low voice:

"I have requested Mrs. Granger's permission to call on her to-morrow morning — for a purpose — and she has appointed twelve o'clock. May I hope to have the pleasure of finding you at home, Madam, afterwards?"

Cleopatra was so much fluttered and moved, by hearing this, of course, incomprehensible speech, that she could only shut her eyes, and shake her head, and give Mr. Dombey her hand; which Mr. Dombey, not exactly knowing what to do with, dropped.

"Dombey, come along!" cried the Major, looking in at the door. "Damme, Sir, old Joe has a great mind to propose an alteration in the name of the Royal Hotel, and that it should be called the Three Jolly Bachelors, in honour of ourselves and Carker." With this, the Major slapped Mr. Dombey on the back, and winking over his shoulder at the ladies, with a frightful tendency of blood to the head, carried him off.

Mrs. Skewton reposed on her sofa, and Edith sat apart, by her

harp, in silence. The mother, trifling with her fan, looked stealthily at the daughter more than once, but the daughter, brooding gloomily with down-cast eyes, was not to be disturbed.

Thus they remained for a long hour, without a word, until Mrs. Skewton's maid appeared, according to custom, to prepare her gradually for night. At night, she should have been a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass, rather than a woman, this attendant; for her touch was as the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eye-brows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown.

The very voice was changed, as it addressed Edith, when they were alone again.

"Why don't you tell me," it said, sharply, "that he is coming here to-morrow by appointment?"

"Because you know it," returned Edith, "Mother."

The mocking emphasis she laid on that one word!

"You know he has bought me," she resumed. "Or that he will, to-morrow. He has considered of his bargain; he has shown it to his friend; he is even rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy to-morrow. God, that I have lived for this, and that I feel it!"

Compress into one handsome face the conscious self-abasement, and the burning indignation of a hundred women, strong in passion and in pride; and there it hid itself with two white shuddering arms.

"What do you mean?" returned the angry mother. "Haven't you from a child —"

"A child!" said Edith, looking at her, "when was I a child!"

What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman — artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men — before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride to-night.”

And as she spoke, she struck her hand upon her beautiful bosom, as though she would have beaten down herself.

“Look at me,” she said, “who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love. Look at me, taught to scheme and plot when children play; and married in my youth — an old age of design—to one for whom I had no feeling but indifference. Look at me, whom he left a widow, dying before his inheritance descended to him — a judgment on you! well deserved! — and tell me what has been my life for ten years since.”

“We have been making every effort to endeavour to secure to you a good establishment,” rejoined her mother. “That has been your life. And now you have got it.”

“There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years,” cried Edith, with a burning brow, and the same bitter emphasis on the one word. “Is it not so? Have I been made the byword of all kinds of men? Have fools, have profligates, have boys, have dotards, dangled after me, and one by one rejected me, and fallen off, because you were too plain with all your cunning: yes, and too true, with all those false pretences: until we have almost come to be notorious? The licence of look and touch,” she said, with flashing eyes, “have I submitted to it, in half the places of resort upon the map of England? Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself? Has *this* been my late childhood? I had none before. Do not tell me that I had, to-night, of all nights in my life!”

“You might have been well married,” said her mother,

"twenty times at least, Edith, if you had given encouragement enough."

"No! Who takes me, refuse that I am, and as I well deserve to be," she answered, raising her head, and trembling in her energy of shame and stormy pride, "shall take me, as this man does, with no art of mine put forth to lure him. He sees me at the auction, and he thinks it well to buy me. Let him! When he came to view me — perhaps to bid — he required to see the roll of my accomplishments. I gave it to him. When he would have me show one of them, to justify his purchase to his men, I require of him to say which he demands, and I exhibit it. I will do no more. He makes the purchase of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money; and I hope it may never disappoint him. I have not vaunted and pressed the bargain; neither have you, so far as I have been able to prevent you."

"You talk strangely to-night, Edith, to your own mother."

"It seems so to me; stranger to me than you," said Edith. "But my education was completed long ago. I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours, and to help myself. The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself." There had been a touching sadness in her voice, but it was gone, when she went on to say, with a curled lip, "So, as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be made rich by these means; all I say, is, I have kept the only purpose I have had the strength to form — I had almost said the power, with you at my side, Mother — and have not tempted this man on."

"This man! You speak," said her mother, "as if you hated him."

"And you thought I loved him, did you not?" she answered, stopping on her way across the room, and looking round. "Shall

"I tell you," she continued, with her eyes fixed on her mother, "who already knows us thoroughly, and reads us right, and before whom I have even less of self-respect or confidence than before my own inward self: being so much degraded by his knowledge of me?"

"This is an attack, I suppose," returned her mother, coldly, "on poor, unfortunate what's-his-name — Mr. Carker! Your want of self-respect and confidence, my dear, in reference to that person (who is very agreeable, it strikes me), is not likely to have much effect on your establishment. Why do you look at me so hard? Are you ill?"

Edith suddenly let fall her face, as if it had been stung, and while she pressed her hands upon it, a terrible tremble crept over her whole frame. It was quickly gone; and with her usual step, she passed out of the room.

The maid who should have been a skeleton, then re-appeared, and giving one arm to her mistress, who appeared to have taken off her manner with her charms, and to have put on paralysis with her flannel gown, collected the ashes of Cleopatra and carried them away in the other, ready for to-morrow's revivification.

CHAPTER VIII.

Alterations.

"So the day has come at length, Susan," said Florence to the excellent Nipper, "when we are going back to our quiet home!"

Susan drew in her breath with an amount of expression not easily described, and further relieving her feelings with a smart cough, answered, "Very quiet indeed, Miss Floy, no doubt. Excessive so."

"When I was a child," said Florence, thoughtfully, and after musing for some moments, "did you ever see that gentle-

man who has taken the trouble to ride down here to speak to me, now three times — three times, I think, Susan?”

“Three times, Miss,” returned the Nipper. “Once was you was out a walking with them Sket —”

Florence gently looked at her, and Miss Nipper checked herself.

“With Sir Barnet and his lady, I mean to say, Miss, and the young gentleman. And two evenings since then.”

“When I was a child, and when company used to come to visit Papa, did you ever see that gentleman at home, Susan?” asked Florence.

“Well, Miss,” returned her maid, after considering, “I really couldn’t say I ever did. When your poor dear Ma died, Miss Floy, I was very new in the family, you see, and *my* element:” the Nipper bridled, as opining that her merits had been always designedly extinguished by Mr. Dombey: “was the floor below the attics.”

“To be sure,” said Florence, still thoughtfully; “you are not likely to have known who came to the house. I quite forgot.”

“Not, Miss, but what we talked about the family and visitors,” said Susan, “and but what I heard much said, although the nurse before Mrs. Richards *did* make unpleasant remarks when I was in company, and hint at little Pitchers, but that could only be attributed, poor thing,” observed Susan with composed forbearance, “to habits of intoxication, for which she was required to leave, and did.”

Florence, who was seated at her chamber window, with her face resting on her hand, sat looking out, and hardly seemed to hear what Susan said, she was so lost in thought.

“At all events, Miss,” said Susan, “I remember very well that this same gentleman, Mr. Carker, was almost, if not quite, as great a gentleman with your Papa then, as he is now. It used

to be said in the house then, Miss, that he was at the head of all your Pa's affairs in the city, and managed the whole, and that your Pa minded him more than anybody, which, begging your pardon Miss Floy he might easy do, for he never minded anybody else. I knew that, Pitcher as I might have been."

Susan Nipper, with an injured remembrance of the nurse before Mrs. Richards, emphasised 'Pitcher' strongly.

"And that Mr. Carker has not fallen off, Miss," she pursued, "but has stood his ground, and kept his credit with your Pa, I know from what is always said among our people by that Perch, whenever he comes to the house, and though he's the weakest weed in the world, Miss Floy, and no one can have a moment's patience with the man, he knows what goes on in the city tolerable well, and says that your Pa does nothing without Mr. Carker, and leaves all to Mr. Carker, and acts according to Mr. Carker, and has Mr. Carker always at his elbow, and I do believe that he believes (that washiest of Perches) that after your Pa, the Emperor of India is the child unborn to Mr. Carker."

Not a word of this was lost on Florence, who, with an awakened interest in Susan's speech, no longer gazed abstractedly on the prospect without, but looked at her, and listened with attention.

"Yes, Susan," she said, when that young lady had concluded. "He is in Papa's confidence, and is his friend, I am sure."

Florence's mind ran high on this theme, and had done for some days. Mr. Carker, in the two visits with which he had followed up his first one, had assumed a confidence between himself and her — a right on his part to be mysterious and stealthy, in telling her that the ship was still unheard of — a kind of mildly restrained power and authority over her — that made her wonder, and caused her great uneasiness. She had no means of repelling it, or of freeing herself from the web he was

gradually winding about her; for that would have required some art and knowledge of the world, opposed to such address as his; and Florence had none. True, he had said no more to her than that there was no news of the ship, and that he feared the worst; but how he came to know that she was interested in the ship, and why he had the right to signify his knowledge to her, so insidiously and darkly, troubled Florence very much.

This conduct on the part of Mr. Carker, and her habit of often considering it with wonder and uneasiness, began to invest him with an uncomfortable fascination in Florence's thoughts. A more distinct remembrance of his features, voice, and manner: which she sometimes courted, as a means of reducing him to the level of a real personage, capable of exerting no greater charm over her than another: did not remove the vague impression. And yet he never frowned, or looked upon her with an air of dislike or animosity, but was always smiling and serene.

Again, Florence, in pursuit of her strong purpose with reference to her father, and her steady resolution to believe that she was herself unwittingly to blame for their so cold and distant relations, would recall to mind that this gentleman was his confidential friend, and would think, with an anxious heart, could her struggling tendency to dislike and fear him be a part of that misfortune in her, which had turned her father's love adrift, and left her so alone? She dreaded that it might be; sometimes believed it was: then she resolved that she would try to conquer this wrong feeling; persuaded herself that she was honoured and encouraged by the notice of her father's friend; and hoped that patient observation of him and trust in him would lead her bleeding feet along that stony road which ended in her father's heart.

Thus, with no one to advise her — for she could advise with no one without seeming to complain against him — gentle Florence tossed on an uneasy sea of doubt and hope; and Mr.

Carker, like a scaly monster of the deep, swam down below, and kept his shining eye upon her.

Florence had a new reason in all this for wishing to be at home again. Her lonely life was better suited to her course of timid hope and doubt: and she feared sometimes, that in her absence she might miss some hopeful chance of testifying her affection for her father. Heaven knows, she might have set her mind at rest, poor child! on this last point; but her slighted love was fluttering within her, and, even in her sleep, it flew away in dreams, and nestled, like a wandering bird come home, upon her father's neck.

Of Walter she thought often. Ah! how often, when the night was gloomy, and the wind was blowing round the house! But hope was strong in her breast. It is so difficult for the young and ardent, even with such experience as hers, to imagine youth and ardour quenched like a weak flame, and the bright day of life merging into night, at noon, that hope was strong yet. Her tears fell frequently for Walter's sufferings; but rarely for his supposed death, and never long.

She had written to the old Instrument Maker, but had received no answer to her note: which indeed required none. Thus matters stood with Florence on the morning when she was going home, gladly, to her old secluded life.

Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, accompanied (much against his will) by their valued charge, Master Barnet, were already gone back to Brighton, where that young gentleman and his fellow pilgrims to Parnassus were then, no doubt, in the continual resumption of their studies. The holiday time was past and over; most of the juvenile guests at the villa had taken their departure; and Florence's long visit was come to an end.

There was one guest, however, albeit not resident within the house, who had been very constant in his attentions to the family, and who still remained devoted to them. This was Mr. Toots,

who after renewing, some weeks ago, the acquaintance he had had the happiness of forming with Skettles Junior, on the night when he burst the Blimberian bonds and soared into freedom with his ring on, called regularly every other day, and left a perfect pack of cards at the hall-door; so many indeed, that the ceremony was quite a deal on the part of Mr. Toots, and a hand at whist on the part of the servant.

Mr. Toots, likewise, with the bold and happy idea of preventing the family from forgetting him (but there is reason to suppose that this expedient originated in the teeming brain of the Chicken), had established a six-oared cutter, manned by aquatic friends of the Chicken's and steered by that illustrious character in person, who wore a bright red fireman's coat for the purpose, and concealed the perpetual black eye with which he was afflicted, beneath a green shade. Previous to the institution of this equipage, Mr. Toots sounded the Chicken on a hypothetical case, as, supposing the Chicken to be enamoured of a young lady named Mary, and to have conceived the intention of starting a boat of his own, what would he call that boat? The Chicken replied, with divers strong asseverations, that he would either christen it Poll or The Chicken's Delight. Improving on this idea, Mr. Toots, after deep study and the exercise of much invention, resolved to call his boat The Toots's Joy, as a delicate compliment to Florence, of which no man knowing the parties, could possibly miss the appreciation.

Stretched on a crimson cushion in his gallant bark, with his shoes in the air, Mr. Toots, in the exercise of his project, had come up the river, day after day, and week after week, and had flitted to and fro, near Sir Barnet's garden, and had caused his crew to cut across and across the river at sharp angles, for his better exhibition to any lookers-out from Sir Barnet's windows, and had had such evolutions performed by the Toot's Delight as had filled all the neighbouring part of the water-side with

astonishment. But whenever he saw any one in Sir Barnet's garden on the brink of the river, Mr. Toots always feigned to be passing there, by a combination of coincidences of the most singular and unlikely description.

"How are you, Toots!" Sir Barnet would say, waving his hand from the lawn, while the artful Chicken steered close in shore.

"How de do, Sir Barnet!" Mr. Toots would answer. "What a surprising thing that I should see *you* here!"

Mr. Toots, in his sagacity, always said this, as if, instead of that being Sir Barnet's house, it were some deserted edifice on the banks of the Nile, or Ganges.

"I never was so surprised!" Mr. Toots would exclaim. — "Is Miss Dombey there?"

Whereupon Florence would appear, perhaps.

"Oh, Diogenes is quite well, Miss Dombey," Mr. Toots would cry. "I called to ask this morning."

"Thank you very much!" the pleasant voice of Florence would reply.

"Won't you come ashore, Toots?" Sir Barnet would say then. "Come! You're in no hurry. Come and see us."

"Oh it's of no consequence, thank you!" Mr. Toots would blushingly rejoin. "I thought Miss Dombey might like to know, that's all. Good bye!" And poor Mr. Toots, who was dying to accept the invitation, but hadn't the courage to do it, signed to the Chicken, with an aching heart and away went the Delight, cleaving the water like an arrow.

The Delight was lying in a state of extraordinary splendour, at the garden steps, on the morning of Florence's departure. When she went down-stairs to take leave, after her talk with Susan, she found Mr. Toots awaiting her in the drawing-room.

"Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey?" said the stricken Toots, always dreadfully disconcerted when the desire of his heart was

gained, and he was speaking to her; "thank you I'm very well indeed, I hope you're the same, so was Diogenes yesterday."

"You are very kind," said Florence.

"Thank you, it's of no consequence," retorted Mr. Toots. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind, in this fine weather, coming home by water, Miss Dombey. There's plenty of room in the boat for your maid."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Florence, hesitating. "I really am — but I would rather not."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," retorted Mr. Toots. "Good morning!"

"Won't you wait and see Lady Skettles?" asked Florence, kindly.

"Oh no, thank you," returned Mr. Toots, "it's of no consequence at all."

So shy was Mr. Toots on such occasions, and so flurried! But Lady Skettles entering at the moment, Mr. Toots was suddenly seized with a passion for asking her how she did, and hoping she was very well; nor could Mr. Toots by any possibility leave off shaking hands with her, until Sir Barnet appeared: to whom he immediately clung with the tenacity of desperation.

"We are losing, to-day, Toots," said Sir Barnet, turning towards Florence, "the light of our house, I assure you."

"Oh, it's of no conseq—I mean yes, to be sure," faltered the embarrassed Toots. "Good morning!"

Notwithstanding the emphatic nature of this farewell, Mr. Toots, instead of going away, stood leering about him, vacantly. Florence, to relieve him, bade adieu, with many thanks, to Lady Skettles, and gave her arm to Sir Barnet.

"May I beg of you, my dear Miss Dombey," said her host, as he conducted her to the carriage, "to present my best compliments to your dear Papa?"

It was distressing to Florence to receive the commission, for she felt as if she were imposing on Sir Barnet, by allowing him to believe that a kindness rendered to her, was rendered to her father. As she could not explain, however, she bowed her head, and thanked him; and again she thought that the dull home, free from such embarrassments, and such reminders of her sorrow, was her natural and best retreat.

Such of her late friends and companions as were yet remaining at the villa, came running from within, and from the garden, to say good bye. They were all attached to her, and very earnest in taking leave of her. Even the household were sorry for her going, and the servants came nodding and curtsying round the carriage door. As Florence looked round on the kind faces, and saw among them those of Sir Barnet and his lady, and of Mr. Toots, who was chuckling and staring at her from a distance, she was reminded of the night when Paul and she had come from Doctor Blimber's: and when the carriage drove away, her face was wet with tears.

Sorrowful tears, but tears of consolation, too; for all the softer memories connected with the dull old house to which she was returning made it dear to her, as they rose up. How long it seemed since she had wandered through the silent rooms: since she had last crept, softly and afraid, into those her father occupied: since she had felt the solemn but yet soothing influence of the beloved dead in every action of her daily life! This new farewell reminded her, besides, of her parting with poor Walter: of his looks and words that night: and of the gracious blending she had noticed in him, of tenderness for those he left behind, with courage and high spirit. His little history was associated with the old house too, and gave it a new claim and hold upon her heart.

Even Susan Nipper softened towards the home of so many years, as they were on their way towards it. Gloomy as it was,

and rigid justice as she rendered to its gloom, she forgave it a great deal. "I shall be glad to see it again, I don't deny, Miss," said the Nipper. "There aint much in it to boast of, but I wouldn't have it burnt or pulled down, neither!"

"You 'll be glad to go through the old rooms, won't you, Susan?" said Florence, smiling.

"Well Miss," returned the Nipper, softening more and more towards the house, as they approached it nearer, "I won't deny but what I shall, though I shall hate 'em again, to-morrow, very likely."

Florence felt that, for her, there was greater peace within it than elsewhere. It was better and easier to keep her secret shut up there, among the tall dark walls, than to carry it abroad into the light, and try to hide it from a crowd of happy eyes. It was better to pursue the study of her loving heart, alone, and find no new discouragements in loving hearts about her. It was easier to hope, and pray, and love on, all uncared for, yet with constancy and patience, in the tranquil sanctuary of such remembrances: although it mouldered, rusted, and decayed about her: than in a new scene, let its gaiety be what it would. She welcomed back her old enchanted dream of life, and longed for the old dark door to close upon her, once again.

Full of such thoughts, they turned into the long and sombre street, Florence was not on that side of the carriage which was nearest to her home, and as the distance lessened between them and it, she looked out of her window for the children over the way.

She was thus engaged, when an exclamation from Susan caused her to turn quickly round.

"Why Gracious me!" cried Susan, breathless, "where 's our house!"

"Our house!" said Florence.

Susan, drawing in her head from the window, thrust it out again, drew it in again as the carriage stopped, and stared at her mistress in amazement.

There was a labyrinth of scaffolding raised all round the house, from the basement to the roof. Loads of bricks and stones, and heaps of mortar, and piles of wood, blocked up half the width and length of the broad street at the side. Ladders were raised against the walls; labourers were climbing up and down; men were at work upon the steps of the scaffolding; painters and decorators were busy inside; great rolls of ornamental paper were being delivered from a cart at the door; an upholsterer's waggon also stopped the way; no furniture was to be seen through the gaping and broken windows in any of the rooms; nothing but workmen, and the implements of their several trades, swarming from the kitchens to the garrets. Inside and outside alike: bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons: hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, and trowel: all at work together, in full chorus!

Florence descended from the coach, half doubting if it were, or could be the right house, until she recognised Towlinson, with a sun-burnt face, standing at the door to receive her.

"There is nothing the matter?" inquired Florence.

"Oh no, Miss."

"There are great alterations going on."

"Yes, Miss, great alterations," said Towlinson.

Florence passed him as if she were in a dream, and hurried up-stairs. The garish light was in the long-darkened drawing-rooms, and there were steps and platforms, and men in paper caps, in the high places. Her mother's picture was gone with the rest of the moveables, and on the mark where it had been, was scrawled in chalk, "this room in panel. Green and gold." The staircase was a labyrinth of posts and planks like the outside of the house, and a whole Olympus of plumbers and glaziers was

reclining in various attitudes, on the skylight. Her own room was not yet touched within, but there were beams and boards raised against it without, baulking the daylight. She went up swiftly to that other bed-room, where the little bed was; and a dark giant of a man with a pipe in his mouth, and his head tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, was staring in at the window.

It was here that Susan Nipper, who had been in quest of Florence, found her, and said, would she go down stairs to her Papa, who wished to speak to her.

“At home! and wishing to speak to me!” cried Florence, trembling.

Susan, who was infinitely more distraught than Florence herself, repeated her errand; and Florence, pale and agitated, hurried down again, without a moment's hesitation. She thought upon the way down, would she dare to kiss him? The longing of her heart resolved her, and she thought she would.

Her father might have heard that heart beat, when it came into his presence. One instant, and it would have beat against his breast —

But he was not alone. There were two ladies there; and Florence stopped. Striving so hard with her emotion, that if her brute friend Di had not burst in and overwhelmed her with his caresses as a welcome home — at which one of the ladies gave a little scream, and that diverted her attention from herself — she would have swooned upon the floor.

“Florence,” said her father, putting out his hand: so stiffly that it held her off: “how do you do?”

Florence took the hand between her own, and putting it timidly to her lips, yielded to its withdrawal. It touched the door in shutting it, with quite as much endearment as it had touched her.

“What dog is that?” said Mr. Dombey, displeased.

“It is a dog, papa — from Brighton.”

“Well!” said Mr. Dombey; and a cloud passed over his face, for he understood her.

“He is very good-tempered,” said Florence, addressing herself with her natural grace and sweetness to the two lady strangers. “He is only glad to see me. Pray forgive him.”

She saw in the glance they interchanged, that the lady who had screamed, and who was seated, was old; and that the other lady, who stood near her papa, was very beautiful, and of an elegant figure.

“Mrs. Skewton,” said her father, turning to the first, and holding out his hand, “this is my daughter Florence.”

“Charming, I am sure,” observed the lady, putting up her glass. “So natural! My darling Florence, you must kiss me, if you please.”

Florence having done so, turned towards the other lady, by whom her father stood waiting.

“Edith,” said Mr. Dombey, “this is my daughter Florence. Florence, this lady will soon be your mama.”

Florence started, and looked up at the beautiful face in a conflict of emotions, among which the tears that name awakened, struggled for a moment with surprise, interest, admiration, and an indefinable sort of fear. Then she cried out, “Oh, papa, may you be happy! may you be very, very happy all your life!” and then fell weeping on the lady’s bosom.

There was a short silence. The beautiful lady, who at first had seemed to hesitate whether or no she should advance to Florence, held her to her breast, and pressed the hand with which she clasped her, close about her waist, as if to reassure and comfort her. Not one word passed the lady’s lips. She bent her head down over Florence, and she kissed her on the cheek, but she said no word.

“Shall we go on through the rooms,” said Mr. Dombey,

“and see how our workmen are doing? Pray allow me, my dear madam.”

He said this, in offering his arm to Mrs. Skewton, who had been looking at Florence through her glass, as though picturing to herself what she might be made, by the infusion — from her own copious store-house, no doubt — of a little more Heart and Nature. Florence was still sobbing on the lady's breast, and holding to her, when Mr. Dombey was heard to say from the Conservatory:

“Let us ask Edith. Dear me, where is she?”

“Edith, my dear!” cried Mrs. Skewton, “where are you? Looking for Mr. Dombey somewhere, I know. We are here, my love.”

The beautiful lady released her hold of Florence, and pressing her lips once more upon her face, withdrew hurriedly, and joined them. Florence remained standing in the same place: happy, sorry, joyful, and in tears, she knew not how, or how long, but all at once: when her new Mama came back, and took her in her arms again.

“Florence,” said the lady, hurriedly, and looking into her face with great earnestness. “You will not begin by hating me?”

“By hating you, Mama!” cried Florence, winding her arm round her neck, and returning the look.

“Hush! Begin by thinking well of me,” said the beautiful lady. “Begin by believing that I will try to make you happy, and that I am prepared to love you, Florence. Good bye. We shall meet again, soon. Good bye! Don't stay here, now.”

Again she pressed her to her breast — she had spoken in a rapid manner, but firmly — and Florence saw her rejoin them in the other room.

And now Florence began to hope that she would learn, from her new and beautiful Mama, how to gain her father's love;

and in her sleep that night, in her lost old home, her own Mama smiled radiantly upon the hope, and blessed it. Dreaming Florence!

CHAPTER IX.

The opening of the eyes of Mrs. Chick.

Miss Tox, all unconscious of any such rare appearances in connexion with Mr. Dombey's house, as scaffoldings and ladders, and wen with their heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, glaring in at the windows like flying genii or strange birds, — having breakfasted one morning at about this eventful period of time, on her customary viands; to wit, one French roll rasped, one egg new laid (or warranted to be), and one little pot of tea, wherein was infused one little silver scoop-full of that herb on behalf of Miss Tox, and one little silver scoop-full on behalf of the teapot — a flight of fancy in which good housekeepers delight; went up stairs to set forth the bird waltz on the harpsichord, to water and arrange the plants, to dust the nick-nacks, and, according to her daily custom, to make her little drawing-room the garland of Princess's Place.

Miss Tox endued herself with the pair of ancient gloves, like dead leaves, in which she was accustomed to perform these avocations — hidden from human sight at other times in a table drawer — and went methodically to work; beginning with the bird waltz; passing, by a natural association of ideas, to her bird — a very high-shouldered canary, stricken in years, and much rumpled, but a piercing singer, as Princess's Place well knew; taking, next in order, the little china ornaments, paper fly-cages, and so forth; and coming round, in good time, to the plants, which generally required to be snipped here and there with a pair of scissors, for some botanical reason that was very powerful with Miss Tox.

Miss Tox was slow in coming to the plants, this morning. The weather was warm, the wind southerly; and there was a sigh of the summer time in Princess's Place, that turned Miss Tox's thoughts upon the country. The pot-boy attached to the Princess's Arms had come out with a can and trickled water, in a flowing pattern, all over Princess's Place, and it gave the weedy ground a fresh scent — quite a growing scent, Miss Tox said. There was a tiny blink of sun peeping in from the great street round the corner, and the smoky sparrows hopped over it and back again, brightening as they passed: or bathed in it, like a stream, and became glorified sparrows, unconnected with chimneys. Legends in praise of Ginger Beer, with pictorial representations of thirsty customers submerged in the effervescence, or stunned by the flying corks, were conspicuous in the window of the Princess's Arms. They were making late hay, somewhere out of town; and though the fragrance had a long way to come, and many counter fragrances to contend with among the dwellings of the poor (may God reward the worthy gentlemen who stickle for the Plague as part and parcel of the wisdom of our ancestors, and do their little best to keep those dwellings miserable!), yet it was wafted faintly into Princess's Place, whispering of Nature and her wholesome air, as such things will, even unto prisoners and captives, and those who are desolate and oppressed, in very spite of aldermen and knights to boot: at whose sage nod — and how they nod! — the rolling world stands still!

Miss Tox sat down upon the window-seat, and thought of her good papa deceased — Mr. Tox, of the Customs Department of the public service; and of her childhood, passed at a seaport, among a considerable quantity of cold tar, and some rusticity. She fell into a softened remembrance of meadows, in old time, gleaming with buttercups, like so many inverted firmaments of golden stars; and how she had made chains of dandelion-stalks for youthful vowers of eternal constancy, dressed chiefly

in nankeen; and how soon those fetters had withered and broken.

Sitting on the window-seat, and looking out upon the sparrows and the blink of sun, Miss Tox thought likewise of her good mama deceased — sister to the owner of the powdered head and pigtail — of her virtues and her rheumatism. And when a man with bulgy legs, and a rough voice, and a heavy basket on his head that crushed his hat into a mere black muffin, came crying flowers down Princess's Place, making his timid little roots of daisies shudder in the vibration of every yell he gave, as though he had been an ogre, hawking little children, summer recollections were so strong upon Miss Tox, that she shook her head, and murmured she would be comparatively old before she knew it — which seemed likely.

In her pensive mood, Miss Tox's thoughts went wandering on Mr. Dombey's track; probably because the Major had returned home to his lodgings opposite, and had just bowed to her from his window. What other reason could Miss Tox have for connecting Mr. Dombey with her summer days and dandelion fetters? Was he more cheerful? thought Miss Tox. Was he reconciled to the decrees of fate? Would he ever marry again; and if yes, whom? What sort of person now!

A flush — it was warm weather — overspread Miss Tox's face, as, while entertaining these meditations, she turned her head, and was surprised by the reflection of her thoughtful image in the chimney-glass. Another flush succeeded when she saw a little carriage drive into Princess's Place, and make straight for her own door. Miss Tox arose, took up her scissors hastily, and so coming, at last, to the plants, was very busy with them when Mrs. Chick entered the room.

"How is my sweetest friend!" exclaimed Miss Tox, with open arms.

A little stateliness was mingled with Miss Tox's sweetest

friend's demeanour, but she kissed Miss Tox, and said, "Lucretia, thank you, I am pretty well. I hope you are the same. Hem!"

Mrs. Chick was labouring under a peculiar little monosyllabic cough; a sort of primer, or easy introduction to the art of coughing.

"You call very early, and how kind that is, my dear!" pursued Miss Tox. "Now, have you breakfasted?"

"Thank you, Lucretia," said Mrs. Chick, "I have. I took an early breakfast" — the good lady seemed curious on the subject of Princess's Place, and looked all round it as she spoke, "with my brother, who has come home."

"He is better, I trust, my love," faltered Miss Tox.

"He is greatly better, thank you. Hem!"

"My dear Louisa must be careful of that cough," remarked Miss Tox.

"It's nothing," returned Mrs. Chick. "It's merely change of weather. We must expect change."

"Of weather?" asked Miss Tox, in her simplicity.

"Of everything," returned Mrs. Chick. "Of course we must. It's a world of change. Any one would surprise me very much, Lucretia, and would greatly alter my opinion of their understanding, if they attempted to contradict or evade what is so perfectly evident. Change!" exclaimed Mrs. Chick, with severe philosophy. "Why, my gracious me, what is there that does *not* change! even the silkworm, who I am sure might be supposed not to trouble itself about such subjects, changes into all sorts of unexpected things continually."

"My Louisa," said the mild Miss Tox, "is ever happy in her illustrations."

"You are so kind, Lucretia," returned Mrs. Chick, a little softened, "as to say so, and to think so, I believe. I hope

neither of us may ever have any cause to lessen our opinion of the other, Lucretia."

"I am sure of it," returned Miss Tox.

Mrs. Chick coughed as before, and drew lines on the carpet with the ivory end of her parasol. Miss Tox, who had experience of her fair friend, and knew that under the pressure of any slight fatigue or vexation she was prone to a discursive kind of irritability, availed herself of the pause, to change the subject.

"Pardon me, my dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "but have I caught sight of the manly form of Mr. Chick in the carriage?"

"He is there," said Mrs. Chick, "but pray leave him there. He has his newspaper, and would be quite contented for the next two hours. Go on with your flowers, Lucretia, and allow me to sit here and rest."

"My Louisa knows," observed Miss Tox, "that between friends like ourselves, any approach to ceremony would be out of the question. Therefore —" Therefore Miss Tox finished the sentence, not in words but action; and putting on her gloves again, which she had taken off, and arming herself once more with her scissors, began to snip and clip among the leaves with microscopic industry.

"Florence has returned home also," said Mrs. Chick, after sitting silent for some time, with her head on one side, and her parasol sketching on the floor; "and really Florence is a great deal too old now, to continue to lead that solitary life to which she has been accustomed. Of course she is. There can be no doubt about it. I should have very little respect, indeed, for anybody who could advocate a different opinion. Whatever my wishes might be, I *could not* respect them. We cannot command our feelings to such an extent as that."

Miss Tox assented, without being particular as to the intelligibility of the proposition.

"If she's a strange girl," said Mrs. Chick, "and if my brother

Paul cannot feel perfectly comfortable in her society, after all the sad things that have happened, and all the terrible disappointments that have been undergone, then, what is the reply? That he must make an effort. That he is bound to make an effort. We have always been a family remarkable for effort. Paul is at the head of the family; almost the only representative of it left — for what am I! I am of no consequence —”

“My dearest love,” remonstrated Miss Tox.

Mrs. Chick dried her eyes, which were, for the moment, overflowing; and proceeded:

“And consequently he is more than ever bound to make an effort. And though his having done so, comes upon me with a sort of shock—for mine is a very weak and foolish nature; which is anything but a blessing I am sure; I often wish my heart was a marble slab, or a paving stone —”

“My sweet Louisa,” remonstrated Miss Tox, again.

“Still, it is a triumph to me to know that he is so true to himself, and to his name of Dombey; although, of course, I always knew he would be. I only hope,” said Mrs. Chick, after a pause, “that she may be worthy of the name too.”

Miss Tox filled a little green watering-pot from a jug, and happening to look up when she had done so, was so surprised by the amount of expression Mrs. Chick had conveyed into her face, and was bestowing upon her, that she put the little watering-pot on the table for the present, and sat down near it.

“My dear Louisa,” said Miss Tox, “will it be the least satisfaction to you, if I venture to observe in reference to that remark, that I, as a humble individual, think your sweet niece in every way most promising?”

“What do you mean, Lucretia?” returned Mrs. Chick, with increased stateliness of manner. “To what remark of mine, my dear, do you refer?”

“Her being worthy of her name, my love,” replied Miss Tox.

“If,” said Mrs. Chick, with solemn patience, “I have not expressed myself with clearness, Lucretia, the fault of course is mine. There is, perhaps, no reason why I should express myself at all, except the intimacy that has subsisted between us, and which I very much hope, Lucretia — confidently hope — nothing will occur to disturb. Because, why should I do anything else? There is no reason; it would be absurd. But I wish to express myself clearly, Lucretia; and therefore to go back to that remark, I must beg to say that it was not intended to relate to Florence, in any way.”

“Indeed!” returned Miss Tox.

“No,” said Mrs. Chick, shortly and decisively.

“Pardon me, my dear,” rejoined her meek friend; “but I cannot have understood it. I fear I am dull.”

Mrs. Chick looked round the room, and over the way; at the plants, at the bird, at the watering-pot, at almost everything within view, except Miss Tox; and finally dropping her glance upon Miss Tox, for a moment, on its way to the ground, said, looking meanwhile with elevated eyebrows at the carpet:

“When I speak, Lucretia, of her being worthy of the name, I speak of my brother Paul’s second wife. I believe I have already said, in effect, if not in the very words I now use, that it is his intention to marry a second wife.”

Miss Tox left her seat in a hurry, and returned to her plants; clipping among the stems and leaves, with as little favour as a barber working at so many pauper heads of hair.

“Whether she will be fully sensible of the distinction conferred upon her,” said Mrs. Chick, in a lofty tone, “is quite another question. I hope she may be. We are bound to think well of one another in this world, and I hope she may be. I have not been advised with myself. If I had been advised with, I have no doubt my advice would have been cavalierly received, and therefore it is infinitely better as it is. I much prefer it, as it is.”

Mis Tox, with head bent down, still clipped among the plants. Mrs. Chick, with energetic shakings of her own head from time to time, continued to hold forth, as if in defiance of somebody.

“If my brother Paul had consulted with me, which he sometimes does — or rather, sometimes used to do; for he will naturally do that no more now, and this is a circumstance which I regard as a relief from responsibility,” said Mrs. Chick, hysterically, “for I thank Heaven I am not jealous —” here Mrs. Chick again shed tears: “if my brother Paul had come to me, and had said, ‘Louisa, what kind of qualities would you advise me to look out for, in a wife?’ I should certainly have answered, ‘Paul, you must have family, you must have beauty, you must have dignity, you must have connexion.’ Those are the words I should have used. You might have led me to the block immediately afterwards,” said Mrs. Chick, as if that consequence were highly probable, “but I should have used them. I should have said, ‘Paul! You to marry a second time without family! You to marry without beauty! You to marry without dignity! You to marry without connexion! There is nobody in the world, not mad, who could dream of daring to entertain such a preposterous idea!’”

Miss Tox stopped clipping; and with her head among the plants, listened attentively. Perhaps Miss Tox thought there was hope in this exordium, and the warmth of Mrs. Chick.

“I should have adopted this course of argument,” pursued the discreet lady, “because I trust I am not a fool. I make no claim to be considered a person of superior intellect — though I believe some people have been extraordinary enough to consider me so; one so little humoured as I am, would very soon be disabused of any such notion; but I trust I am not a downright fool. And to tell me,” said Mrs. Chick with ineffable disdain, “that my brother Paul Dombey could ever contemplate the possibility of uniting himself to anybody — I don’t care who” — she was more

sharp and emphatic in that short clause than in any other part of her discourse — “not possessing these requisites, would be to insult what understanding I *have* got, as much as if I was to be told that I was born and bred an elephant, which I *may* be told next,” said Mrs. Chick, with resignation. “It wouldn’t surprise me at all. I expect it.”

In the moment’s silence that ensued, Miss Tox’s scissors gave a feeble clip or two; but Miss Tox’s face was still invisible, and Miss Tox’s morning gown was agitated. Mrs. Chick looked sideways at her, through the intervening plants; and went on to say, in a tone of bland conviction, and as one dwelling on a point of fact that hardly required to be stated:

“Therefore, of course my brother Paul has done what was to be expected of him, and what anybody might have foreseen he would do, if he entered the marriage state again. I confess it takes me rather by surprise, however gratifying; because when Paul went out of town I had no idea at all that he would form any attachment out of town, and he certainly had no attachment when he left here. However, it seems to be extremely desirable in every point of view. I have no doubt the mother is a most genteel and elegant creature, and I have no right whatever to dispute the policy of her living with them: which is Paul’s affair, not mine — and as to Paul’s choice, herself, I have only seen her picture yet, but that is beautiful indeed. Her name is beautiful too,” said Mrs. Chick, shaking her head with energy, and arranging herself in her chair; “Edith is at once uncommon, as it strikes me, and distinguished. Consequently, Lucretia, I have no doubt you will be happy to hear that the marriage is to take place immediately — of course, you will:” great emphasis again: “and that you are delighted with this change in the condition of my brother, who has shown you a great deal of pleasant attention at various times.”

Miss Tox made no verbal answer, but took up the little wa-

tering-pot with a trembling hand, and looked vacantly round as if considering what article of furniture would be improved by the contents. The room door opening at this crisis of Miss Tox's feelings, she started, laughed aloud, and fell into the arms of the person entering; happily insensible alike of Mrs. Chick's indignant countenance, and of the Major at his window over the way, who had his double-barrelled eye-glass in full action, and whose face and figure were dilated with Mephistophelean joy.

Not so the expatriated Native, amazed supporter of Miss Tox's swooning form, who, coming straight up stairs, with a polite inquiry touching Miss Tox's health (in exact pursuance of the Major's malicious instructions), had accidentally arrived in the very nick of time to catch the delicate burden in his arms, and to receive the contents of the little watering-pot in his shoe; both of which circumstances, coupled with his consciousness of being closely watched by the wrathful Major, who had threatened the usual penalty in regard of every bone in his skin in case of any failure, combined to render him a moving spectacle of mental and bodily distress.

For some moments, this afflicted foreigner remained clasping Miss Tox to his heart, with an energy of action in remarkable opposition to his disconcerted face, while that poor lady trickled slowly down upon him the very last sprinklings of the little watering-pot, as if he were a delicate exotic (which indeed he was), and might be almost expected to blow while the gentle rain descended. Mrs. Chick, at length recovering sufficient presence of mind to interpose, commanded him to drop Miss Tox upon the sofa and withdraw; and the exile promptly obeying, she applied herself to promote Miss Tox's recovery.

But none of that gentle concern which usually characterises the daughters of Eve in their tending of each other; none of that freemasonry in fainting, by which they are generally bound together in a mysterious bond of sisterhood; was visible in Mrs.

Chick's demeanour. Rather like the executioner who restores the victim to sensation previous to proceeding with the torture (or was wont to do so, in the good old times for which all true men wear perpetual mourning), did Mrs. Chick administer the smelling-bottle, the slapping on the hands, the dashing of cold water on the face, and the other proved remedies. And when, at length, Miss Tox opened her eyes, and gradually became restored to animation and consciousness, Mrs. Chick drew off as from a criminal, and reversing the precedent of the murdered king of Denmark, regarded her more in anger than in sorrow.

"Lucretia!" said Mrs. Chick. "I will not attempt to disguise what I feel. My eyes are opened, all at once. I wouldn't have believed this, if a Saint had told it to me."

"I am foolish to give way to faintness," Miss Tox faltered. "I shall be better presently."

"You will be better presently, Lucretia!" repeated Mrs. Chick, with exceeding scorn. "Do you suppose I am blind? Do you imagine I am in my second childhood? No, Lucretia! I am obliged to you!"

Miss Tox directed an imploring, helpless kind of look towards her friend, and put her handkerchief before her face.

"If any one had told me this yesterday," said Mrs. Chick with majesty, "or even half-an-hour ago, I should have been tempted, I almost believe, to strike them to the earth. Lucretia Tox, my eyes are opened to you all at once. The scales:" here Mrs. Chick cast down an imaginary pair, such as are commonly used in grocer's shops: "have fallen from my sight. The blindness of my confidence is past, Lucretia. It has been abused and played upon, and evasion is quite out of the question now, I assure you."

"Oh! to what do you allude so cruelly, my love?" asked Miss Tox, through her tears.

"Lucretia," said Mrs. Chick, "ask your own heart. I must

entreat you not to address me by any such familiar term as you have just used, if you please. I have some self-respect left, though you may think otherwise."

"Oh, Louisa!" cried Miss Tox. "How can you speak to me like that?"

"How can I speak to you like that?" retorted Mrs. Chick, who, in default of having any particular argument to sustain herself upon, relied principally on such repetitions for her most withering effects. "Like that! You may well say like that, indeed!"

Miss Tox sobbed pitifully.

"The idea!" said Mrs. Chick, "of your having basked at my brother's fireside, like a serpent, and wound yourself, through me, almost into his confidence, Lucretia, that you might, in secret, entertain designs upon him, and dare to aspire to contemplate the possibility of his uniting himself to *you*! Why, it is an idea," said Mrs. Chick, with sarcastic dignity, "the absurdity of which almost relieves its treachery."

"Pray, Louisa," urged Miss Tox, "do not say such dreadful things."

"Dreadful things!" repeated Mrs. Chick. "Dreadful things! Is it not a fact, Lucretia, that you have just now been unable to command your feelings even before me, whose eyes you had so completely closed?"

"I have made no complaint," sobbed Miss Tox. "I have said nothing. If I have been a little overpowered by your news, Louisa, and have ever had any lingering thought that Mr. Dombey was inclined to be particular towards me, surely *you* will not condemn me."

"She is going to say," said Mrs. Chick, addressing herself to the whole of the furniture, in a comprehensive glance of resignation and appeal, "She is going to say — I know it — that I have encouraged her!"

"I don't wish to exchange reproaches, dear Louisa," sobbed Miss Tox. "Nor do I wish to complain. But, in my own defence —"

"Yes," cried Mrs. Chick, looking round the room with a prophetic smile, "that 's what she 's going to say. I knew it. You had better say it. Say it openly! Be open, Lucretia Tox," said Mrs. Chick, with desperate sternness, "whatever you are."

"In my own defence," faltered Miss Tox, "and only in my own defence against your unkind words, my dear Louisa, I would merely ask you if you haven't often favoured such a fancy, and even said it might happen, for anything we could tell?"

"There is a point," said Mrs. Chick, rising, not as if she were going to stop at the floor, but as if she were about to soar up, high, into her native skies, "beyond which endurance becomes ridiculous, if not culpable. I can bear much; but not too much. What spell was on me when I came into this house this day, I don't know; but I had a presentiment — a dark presentiment," said Mrs. Chick, with a shiver, "that something was going to happen. Well may I have had that foreboding, Lucretia, when my confidence of many years is destroyed in an instant, when my eyes are opened all at once, and when I find you revealed in your true colours. Lucretia, I have been mistaken in you. It is better for us both that this subject should end here. I wish you well, and I shall ever wish you well. But, as an individual who desires to be true to herself in her own poor position, whatever that position may be, or may not be — and as the sister of my brother — and as the sister-in-law of my brother's wife — and as a connexion by marriage of my brother's wife's mother — may I be permitted to add, as a Dombey? — I can wish you nothing else but good morning."

These words, delivered with cutting suavity, tempered and chastened by a lofty air of moral rectitude, carried the speaker to the door. There she inclined her head in a ghostly and statue-

like manner, and so withdrew to her carriage, to seek comfort and consolation in the arms of Mr. Chick, her lord.

Figuratively speaking, that is to say; for the arms of Mr. Chick were full of his newspaper. Neither did that gentleman address his eyes towards his wife otherwise than by stealth. Neither did he offer any consolation whatever. In short, he sat reading, and humming fag ends of tunes, and sometimes glancing furtively at her without delivering himself of a word, good, bad, or indifferent.

In the meantime Mrs. Chick sat swelling and bridling, and tossing her head, as if she were still repeating that solemn formula of farewell to Lucretia Tox. At length, she said aloud, 'Oh the extent to which her eyes had been opened that day!'

"To which your eyes have been opened, my dear!" repeated Mr. Chick.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Mrs. Chick. "If you can bear to see me in this state, and not ask me what the matter is, you had better hold your tongue for ever."

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked Mr. Chick.

"To think," said Mrs. Chick, in a state of soliloquy, "that she should ever have conceived the base idea of connecting herself with our family by a marriage with Paul! To think that when she was playing at horses with that dear child who is now in his grave — I never liked it at the time — she should have been hiding such a double-faced design! I wonder she was never afraid that something would happen to her. She is fortunate if nothing does."

"I really thought, my dear," said Mr. Chick slowly, after rubbing the bridge of his nose for some time with his newspaper, "that you had gone on the same tack yourself, all along, until this morning; and had thought it would be a convenient thing enough, if it could have been brought about."

Mrs. Chick instantly burst into tears, and told Mr. Chick that

if he wished to trample upon her with his boots, he had better do it.

“But with Lucretia Tox I have done,” said Mrs. Chick, after abandoning herself to her feelings for some minutes, to Mr. Chick’s great terror. “I can bear to resign Paul’s confidence in favour of one who, I hope and trust, may be deserving of it, and with whom he has a perfect right to replace poor Fanny if he chooses; I can bear to be informed, in Paul’s cool manner, of such a change in his plans, and never to be consulted until all is settled and determined; but deceit I can *not* bear, and with Lucretia Tox I have done. It is better as it is,” said Mrs. Chick, piously; “much better. It would have been a long time before I could have accommodated myself comfortably with her, after this; and I really don’t know, as Paul is going to be very grand, and these are people of condition, that she would have been quite presentable, and might not have compromised myself. There’s a providence in everything; everything works for the best; I have been tried to-day, but, upon the whole, I don’t regret it.”

In which Christian spirit, Mrs. Chick dried her eyes, and smoothed her lap, and sat as became a person calm under a great wrong. Mr. Chick, feeling his unworthiness no doubt, took an early opportunity of being set down at a street corner and walking away, whistling, with his shoulders very much raised, and his hands in his pockets.

While poor excommunicated Miss Tox, who, if she were a fawner and toad-eater, was at least an honest and a constant one, and had ever borne a faithful friendship towards her impeacher, and had been truly absorbed and swallowed up in devotion to the magnificence of Mr. Dombey — while poor excommunicated Miss Tox watered her plants with her tears, and felt that it was winter in Princess’s Place.

CHAPTER X.

The interval before the marriage.

ALTHOUGH the enchanted house was no more, and the working world had broken into it, and was hammering and crashing and tramping up and down stairs all day long, keeping Diogenes in an incessant paroxysm of barking, from sunrise to sunset — evidently convinced that his enemy had got the better of him at last, and was then sacking the premises in triumphant defiance — there was, at first, no other great change in the method of Florence's life. At night, when the workpeople went away, the house was dreary and deserted again; and Florence, listening to their voices echoing through the hall and staircase as they departed, pictured to herself the cheerful homes to which they were returning, and the children who were waiting for them, and was glad to think that they were merry and well pleased to go.

She welcomed back the evening silence as an old friend, but it came now with an altered face, and looked more kindly on her. Fresh hope was in it. The beautiful lady who had soothed and caressed her, in the very room in which her heart had been so wrung, was a spirit of promise to her. Soft shadows of the bright life dawning, when her father's affection should be gradually won, and all, or much should be restored, of what she had lost on the dark day when a mother's love had faded with a mother's last breath on her cheek, moved about her in the twilight and were welcome company. Peeping at the rosy children her neighbours, it was a new and precious sensation to think that they might soon speak together and know each other; when she would not fear, as of old, to show herself before them, lest they should be grieved to see her in her black dress sitting there alone!

In her thoughts of her new mother, and in the love and trust

overflowing her pure heart towards her, Florence loved her own dead mother more and more. She had no fear of setting up a rival in her breast. The new flower sprang from the deep-planted and long-cherished root, she knew. Every gentle word that had fallen from the lips of the beautiful lady, sounded to Florence like an echo of the voice long hushed and silent. How could she love that memory less for living tenderness, when it was her memory of all parental tenderness and love!

Florence was, one day, sitting reading in her room, and thinking of the lady and her promised visit soon — for her book turned on a kindred subject — when, raising her eyes, she saw her standing in the doorway.

“Mama!” cried Florence, joyfully meeting her. “Come again!”

“Not Mama yet,” returned the lady, with a serious smile, as she encircled Florence’s neck with her arm.

“But very soon to be,” cried Florence.

“Very soon now, Florence: very soon.”

Edith bent her head a little, so as to press the blooming cheek of Florence against her own, and for some few moments remained thus silent. There was something so very tender in her manner, that Florence was even more sensible of it than on the first occasion of their meeting.

She led Florence to a chair beside her, and sat down: Florence looking in her face, quite wondering at its beauty, and willingly leaving her hand in hers.

“Have you been alone, Florence, since I was here last?”

“Oh yes!” smiled Florence, hastily.

She hesitated and cast down her eyes; for her new mama was very earnest in her look, and the look was intently and thoughtfully fixed upon her face.

“I — I — am used to be alone,” said Florence. “I don’t

mind it at all. Di and I pass whole days together, sometimes." Florence might have said, whole weeks, and months.

"Is Di your maid, love?"

"My dog, Mama," said Florence, laughing. "Susan is my maid."

"And these are your rooms," said Edith, looking round. "I was not shown these rooms the other day. We must have them improved, Florence. They shall be made the prettiest in the house."

"If I might change them, Mama," returned Florence; "there is one up-stairs I should like much better."

"Is this not high enough, dear girl?" asked Edith, smiling.

"The other was my brother's room," said Florence, "and I am very fond of it. I would have spoken to Papa about it when I came home, and found the workmen here, and everything changing; but —"

Florence dropped her eyes, lest the same look should make her falter again.

"— but I was afraid it might distress him; and as you said you would be here again soon, Mama, and are the mistress of everything, I determined to take courage and ask you."

Edith sat looking at her, with her brilliant eyes intent upon her face, until Florence raising her own, she, in her turn, withdrew her gaze, and turned it on the ground. It was then that Florence thought how different this lady's beauty was, from what she had supposed. She had thought it of a proud and lofty kind; yet her manner was so subdued and gentle, that if she had been of Florence's own age and character, it scarcely could have invited confidence more.

Except when a constrained and singular reserve crept over her; and then she seemed (but Florence hardly understood this, though she could not choose but notice it, and think about it) as if she were humbled before Florence, and ill at ease. When

she had said that she was not her Mama yet, and when Florence had called her the mistress of everything there, this change in her was quick and startling; and now, while the eyes of Florence rested on her face, she sat as though she would have shrunk and hidden from her, rather than as one about to love and cherish her, in right of such a near connexion.

She gave Florence her ready promise, about her new room, and said she would give directions about it herself. She then asked some questions concerning poor Paul; and when they had sat in conversation for some time, told Florence she had come to take her to her own home.

"We have come to London now, my mother and I," said Edith, "and you shall stay with us until I am married. I wish that we should know and trust each other, Florence."

"You are very kind to me," said Florence, "dear Mama. How much I thank you!"

"Let me say now, for it may be the best opportunity," continued Edith, looking round to see that they were quite alone, and speaking in a lower voice, "that when I am married, and have gone away for some weeks, I shall be easier at heart if you will come home here. No matter who invites you to stay elsewhere. Come home here. It is better to be alone than — what I would say is," she added, checking herself, "that I know well you are best at home, dear Florence."

"I will come home on the very day, Mama."

"Do so. I rely on that promise. Now, prepare to come with me, dear girl. You will find me down stairs when you are ready."

Slowly and thoughtfully did Edith wander alone through the mansion of which she was so soon to be the lady: and little heed took she of all the elegance and splendour it began to display. The same indomitable haughtiness of soul, the same proud scorn expressed in eye and lip, the same fierce beauty, only tamed by a sense of its own little worth, and of the little worth of every-

thing around it, went through the grand saloons and halls, that had got loose among the shady trees, and raged and rent themselves. The mimic roses on the walls and floors were set round with sharp thorns, that tore her breast; in every scrap of gold so dazzling to the eye, she saw some hateful atom of her purchase-money; the broad high mirrors showed her, at full length, a woman with a noble quality yet dwelling in her nature, who was too false to her better self, and too debased and lost, to save herself. She believed that all this was so plain more or less, to all eyes, that she had no resource or power of self-assertion but in pride: and with this pride, which tortured her own heart night and day, she fought her fate out, braved it, and defied it.

Was this the woman whom Florence — an innocent girl, strong only in her earnestness and simple truth — could so impress and quell, that by her side she was another creature, with her tempest of passion hushed, and her very pride itself subdued? Was this the woman who now sat beside her in a carriage, with their arms entwined, and who, while she courted and entreated her to love and trust her, drew her fair head to nestle on her breast, and would have laid down life to shield it from wrong or harm?

Oh, Edith! it were well to die, indeed, at such a time! Better and happier far, perhaps, to die so, Edith, than to live on to the end!

The Honourable Mrs. Skewton, who was thinking of anything rather than of such sentiments — for, like many genteel persons who have existed at various times, she set her face against death altogether, and objected to the mention of any such low and levelling upstart — had borrowed a house in Brook-street, Grosvenor-square, from a stately relative (one of the Feenix brood), who was out of town, and who did not object to lending it, in the handsomest manner, for nuptial purposes, as the loan implied his final release and acquittance from all further loans

and gifts to Mrs. Skewton and her daughter. It being necessary for the credit of the family to make a handsome appearance at such a time, Mrs. Skewton, with the assistance of an accommodating tradesman resident in the parish of Mary-le-bone, who lent out all sorts of articles to the nobility and gentry, from a service of plate to an army of footmen, clapped into this house a silver-headed butler (who was charged extra on that account, as having the appearance of an ancient family retainer), two very tall young men in livery, and a select staff of kitchen-servants; so that a legend arose, down stairs, that Withers the page, released at once from his numerous household duties, and from the propulsion of the wheeled-chair (inconsistent with the metropolis), had been several times observed to rub his eyes and pinch his limbs, as if he misdoubted his having overslept himself at the Leamington milkman's, and being still in a celestial dream. A variety of requisites in plate and china being also conveyed to the same establishment from the same convenient source, with several miscellaneous articles, including a neat chariot and a pair of bays, Mrs. Skewton cushioned herself on the principal sofa, in the Cleopatra attitude, and held her court in fair state.

"And how," said Mrs. Skewton, on the entrance of her daughter and her charge, "is my charming Florence? You must come and kiss me, Florence, if you please, my love."

Florence was timidly stooping to pick out a place in the white part of Mrs. Skewton's face, when that lady presented her ear, and relieved her of her difficulty.

"Edith, my dear," said Mrs. Skewton, "positively, I—stand a little more in the light, my sweetest Florence, for a moment."

Florence blushing complied.

"You don't remember, dearest Edith," said her mother, "what you were when you were about the same age as our exceedingly precious Florence, or a few years younger?"

"I have long forgotten, mother."

"For positively, my dear," said Mrs. Skewton, "I do think that I see a decided resemblance to what you were then, in our extremely fascinating young friend. And it shows," said Mrs. Skewton, in a lower voice, which conveyed her opinion that Florence was in a very unfinished state, "what cultivation will do."

"It does, indeed," was Edith's stern reply.

Her mother eyed her sharply for a moment, and feeling herself on unsafe ground, said, as a diversion:

"My charming Florence, you must come and kiss me once more, if you please, my love."

Florence complied, of course, and again imprinted her lips on Mrs. Skewton's ear.

"And you have heard, no doubt, my darling pet," said Mrs. Skewton, detaining her hand, "that your Papa, whom we all perfectly adore and dote upon, is to be married to my dearest Edith this day week."

"I knew it would be very soon," returned Florence, "but not exactly when."

"My darling Edith," urged her mother, gaily, "is it possible you have not told Florence?"

"Why should I tell Florence?" she returned, so suddenly and harshly, that Florence could scarcely believe it was the same voice.

Mrs. Skewton then told Florence, as another and safer diversion, that her father was coming to dinner, and that he would no doubt be charmingly surprised to see her; as he had spoken last night of dressing in the city, and had known nothing of Edith's design, the execution of which, according to Mrs. Skewton's expectation, would throw him into a perfect ecstasy. Florence was troubled to hear this; and her distress became so keen, as the dinner-hour approached, that if she had known how to frame an

entreaty to be suffered to return home, without involving her father in her explanation, she would have hurried back on foot, bareheaded, breathless, and alone, rather than incur the risk of meeting his displeasure.

As the time drew nearer, she could hardly breathe. She dared not approach a window, lest he should see her from the street. She dared not go up stairs to hide her emotion, lest, in passing out at the door, she should meet him unexpectedly; besides which dread, she felt as though she never could come back again if she were summoned to his presence. In this conflict of her fears, she was sitting by Cleopatra's couch, endeavouring to understand and to reply to the bald discourse of that lady, when she heard his foot upon the stair.

"I hear him now!" cried Florence, starting. "He is coming!"

Cleopatra, who in her juvenility was always playfully disposed, and who in her self-engrossment did not trouble herself about the nature of this agitation, pushed Florence behind her couch, and dropped a shawl over her, preparatory to giving Mr. Dombey a rapture of surprise. It was so quickly done, that in a moment Florence heard his awful step in the room.

He saluted his intended mother-in-law, and his intended bride. The strange sound of his voice thrilled through the whole frame of his child.

"My dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "come here and tell me how your pretty Florence is."

"Florence is very well," said Mr. Dombey, advancing towards the couch.

"At home?"

"At home," said Mr. Dombey.

"My dear Dombey," returned Cleopatra, with bewitching vivacity; "Now are you sure you are not deceiving me? I don't know what my dearest Edith will say to me when I make such a

declaration, but upon my honour I am afraid you are the falsest of men, my dear Dombey."

Though he had been ; and had been detected, on the spot, in the most enormous falsehood that was ever said or done ; he could hardly have been more disconcerted than he was, when Mrs. Skewton plucked the shawl away, and Florence, pale and trembling, rose before him like a ghost. He had not yet recovered his presence of mind, when Florence had run up to him, clasped her hands round his neck, kissed his face, and hurried out of the room. He looked round as if to refer the matter to somebody else, but Edith had gone after Florence, instantly.

"Now, confess, my dear Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, giving him her hand, "that you never were more surprised and pleased in your life."

"I never was more surprised," said Mr. Dombey.

"Nor pleased, my dearest Dombey?" returned Mrs. Skewton, holding up her fan.

"I — yes, I am exceedingly glad to meet Florence here," said Mr. Dombey. He appeared to consider gravely about it for a moment, and then said, more decidedly, "Yes, I really am very glad indeed to meet Florence here."

"You wonder how she comes here?" said Mrs. Skewton, "don't you?"

"Edith, perhaps—" suggested Mr. Dombey.

"Ah! wicked guesser!" replied Cleopatra, shaking her head. "Ah! cunning, cunning man! One shouldn't tell these things ; your sex, my dear Dombey, are so vain, and so apt to abuse our weaknesses ; but, you know my open soul — very well ; immediately."

This was addressed to one of the very tall young men who announced dinner.

"But Edith, my dear Dombey," she continued in a whisper, "when she cannot have you near her — and as I tell her, she

cannot expect that always — will at least have near her something or somebody belonging to you. Well, how extremely natural that is! And in this spirit, nothing would keep her from riding off to-day to fetch our darling Florence. Well, how excessively charming that is!”

As she waited for an answer, Mr. Dombey answered, “Eminently so.”

“Bless you, my dear Dombey, for that proof of heart!” cried Cleopatra, squeezing his hand. “But I am growing too serious! Take me down stairs like an angel, and let us see what these people intend to give us for dinner. Bless you, dear Dombey!”

Cleopatra skipping off her couch with tolerable briskness, after the last benediction, Mr. Dombey took her arm in his and led her ceremoniously down stairs; one of the very tall young men on hire, whose organ of veneration was imperfectly developed, thrusting his tongue into his cheek, for the entertainment of the other very tall young man on hire, as the couple turned into the dining-room.

Florence and Edith were already there, and sitting side by side. Florence would have risen when her father entered, to resign her chair to him; but Edith openly put her hand upon her arm, and Mr. Dombey took an opposite place at the round table.

The conversation was almost entirely sustained by Mrs. Skewton. Florence hardly dared to raise her eyes, lest they should reveal the traces of tears; far less dared to speak; and Edith never uttered one word, unless in answer to a question. Verily, Cleopatra worked hard, for the establishment that was so nearly clutched; and verily it should have been a rich one to reward her!

“And so your preparations are nearly finished at last, my dear Dombey?” said Cleopatra, when the dessert was put upon the table, and the silver-headed butler had withdrawn. “Even the lawyers’ preparations!”

"Yes, Madam," replied Mr. Dombey; "the deed of settlement, the professional gentlemen inform me, is now ready, and as I was mentioning to you, Edith has only to do us the favour to suggest her own time for its execution."

Edith sat, like a handsome statue; as cold, as silent, and as still.

"My dearest love," said Cleopatra, "do you hear what Mr. Dombey says? Ah, my dear Dombey!" aside to that gentleman, "How her absence, as the time approaches, reminds me of the days, when that most agreeable of creatures, her Papa, was in your situation!"

"I have nothing to suggest. It shall be when you please," said Edith, scarcely looking over the table at Mr. Dombey.

"To-morrow?" suggested Mr. Dombey.

"If you please."

"Or would next day," said Mr. Dombey, "suit your engagements better?"

"I have no engagements. I am always at your disposal. Let it be when you like."

"No engagements, my dear Edith!" remonstrated her mother, "when you are in a most terrible state of flurry all day long, and have a thousand and one appointments with all sorts of tradespeople!"

"They are of your making," returned Edith, turning on her with a slight contraction of her brow. "You and Mr. Dombey can arrange between you."

"Very true, indeed, my love, and most considerate of you!" said Cleopatra. "My darling Florence, you must really come and kiss me once more, if you please, my dear!"

Singular coincidence, that these gushes of interest in Florence hurried Cleopatra away from almost every dialogue in which Edith had a share, however trifling! Florence had certainly never

undergone so much embracing, and perhaps had never been, unconsciously, so useful in her life.

Mr. Dombey was far from quarrelling, in his own breast, with the manner of his beautiful betrothed. He had that good reason for sympathy with haughtiness and coldness, which is found in a fellow-feeling. It flattered him to think how these deferred to him, in Edith's case, and seemed to have no will apart from his. It flattered him to picture to himself, this proud and stately woman doing the honours of his house, and chilling his guests after his own manner. The dignity of Dombey and Son would be heightened and maintained, indeed, in such hands.

So thought Mr. Dombey, when he was left alone at the dining-table, and mused upon his past and future fortunes: finding no uncongeniality in an air of scant and gloomy state that pervaded the room, in colour a dark brown, with black hatchments of pictures blotching the walls, and twenty-four black chairs, with almost as many nails in them as so many coffins, waiting like mutes, upon the threshold of the Turkey carpet; and two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra on the side-board, and a musty smell prevailing as if the ashes of ten thousand dinners were entombed in the sarcophagus below it. The owner of the house lived much abroad; the air of England seldom agreed long with a member of the Feenix family; and the room had gradually put itself into deeper and still deeper mourning for him, until it was become so funereal as to want nothing but a body in it to be quite complete.

No bad representation of the body, for the nonce, in his unbending form, if not in his attitude, Mr. Dombey looked down into the cold depths of the dead sea of mahogany on which the fruit dishes and decanters lay at anchor; as if the subjects of his thoughts were rising towards the surface one by one, and plunging down again. Edith was there in all her majesty of brow and figure; and close to her came Florence, with her timid head

turned to him, as it had been, for an instant, when she left the room; and Edith's eyes upon her, and Edith's hand put out protectingly. A little figure in a low arm-chair came springing next into the light, and looked upon him wonderingly, with its bright eyes and its old-young face gleaming as in the flickering of an evening fire. Again came Florence close upon it, and absorbed his whole attention. Whether as a fore-doomed difficulty and disappointment to him; whether as a rival who had crossed him in his way, and might again; whether as his child, of whom, in his successful wooing, he could stoop to think, as claiming, at such a time, to be no more estranged; or whether as a hint to him that the mere appearance of caring for his own blood should be maintained in his new relations; he best knew. Indifferently well, perhaps, at best; for marriage company and marriage altars, and ambitious scenes — still blotted here and there with Florence — always Florence — turned up so fast, and so confusedly, that he rose, and went up stairs to escape them.

It was quite late at night before candles were brought; for at present they made Mrs. Skewton's head ache, she complained; and in the meantime Florence and Mrs. Skewton talked together (Cleopatra being very anxious to keep her close to herself), or Florence touched the piano softly for Mrs. Skewton's delight; to make no mention of a few occasions in the course of the evening, when that affectionate lady was impelled to solicit another kiss, and which always happened after Edith had said anything. They were not many, however, for Edith sat apart by an open window during the whole time (in spite of her mother's fears that she would take cold), and remained there until Mr. Dombey took leave. He was serenely gracious to Florence when he did so; and Florence went to bed in a room within Edith's, so happy and hopeful, that she thought of her late self as if it were some other poor deserted girl who was to be pitied for her sorrow; and in her pity, sobbed herself to sleep.

The week fled fast. There were drives to milliners, dress-makers, jewellers, lawyers, florists, pastry-cooks; and Florence was always of the party. Florence was to go to the wedding. Florence was to cast off her mourning, and to wear a brilliant dress on the occasion. The milliner's intentions on the subject of this dress — the milliner was a Frenchwoman, and greatly resembled Mrs. Skewton — were so chaste and elegant, that Mrs. Skewton bespoke one like it for herself. The milliner said it would become her to admiration, and that all the world would take her for the young lady's sister.

The week fled faster. Edith looked at nothing and cared for nothing. Her rich dresses came home, and were tried on, and were loudly commended by Mrs. Skewton and the milliners, and were put away without a word from her. Mrs. Skewton made their plans for every day, and executed them. Sometimes Edith sat in the carriage when they went to make purchases; sometimes, when it was absolutely necessary, she went into the shops. But Mrs. Skewton conducted the whole business, whatever it happened to be; and Edith looked on as uninterested and with as much apparent indifference as if she had no concern in it. Florence might perhaps have thought she was haughty and listless, but that she was never so to her. So Florence quenched her wonder in her gratitude whenever it broke out, and soon subdued it.

The week fled faster. It had nearly winged its flight away. The last night of the week, the night before the marriage, was come. In the dark room — for Mrs. Skewton's head was no better yet, though she expected to recover permanently to-morrow — were that lady, Edith, and Mr. Dombey. Edith was at her open window looking out into the street; Mr. Dombey and Cleopatra were talking softly on the sofa. It was growing late; and Florence being fatigued, had gone to bed.

“My dear Dombey,” said Cleopatra, “you will leave me

Florence to-morrow, when you deprive me of my sweetest Edith."

Mr. Dombey said he would, with pleasure.

"To have her about me, here, while you are both at Paris, and to think that, at her age, I am assisting in the formation of her mind, my dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "will be a perfect balm to me in the extremely shattered state to which I shall be reduced."

Edith turned her head suddenly. Her listless manner was exchanged, in a moment, to one of burning interest, and, unseen in the darkness, she attended closely to their conversation.

Mr. Dombey would be delighted to leave Florence in such admirable guardianship.

"My dear Dombey," returned Cleopatra, "a thousand thanks for your good opinion. I feared you were going, with malice aforethought, as the dreadful lawyers say — those horrid proses! — to condemn me to utter solitude."

"Why do me so great an injustice, my dear Madam?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Because my charming Florence tells me so positively she must go home to-morrow," returned Cleopatra, "that I began to be afraid, my dearest Dombey, you were quite a Bashaw."

"I assure you, Madam!" said Mr. Dombey, "I have laid no commands on Florence; and if I had, there are no commands like your wish."

"My dear Dombey," replied Cleopatra, "what a courtier you are! Though I'll not say so, either; for courtiers have no heart, and yours pervades your charming life and character. And are you really going so early, my dear Dombey?"

Oh, indeed! it was late, and Mr. Dombey feared he must.

"Is this a fact, or is it all a dream?" lisped Cleopatra. "Can I believe, my dearest Dombey, that you are coming back to-

morrow morning to deprive me of my sweet companion; my own Edith!"

Mr. Dombey, who was accustomed to take things literally, reminded Mrs. Skewton that they were to meet first at the church.

"The pang," said Mrs. Skewton, "of consigning a child, even to you, my dear Dombey, is one of the most excruciating imaginable; and combined with a naturally delicate constitution, and the extreme stupidity of the pastry-cook who has undertaken the breakfast, is almost too much for my poor strength. But I shall rally, my dear Dombey, in the morning; do not fear for me, or be uneasy on my account: Heaven bless you! My dearest Edith!" she cried archly. "Somebody is going, pet."

Edith, who had turned her head again towards the window, and whose interest in their conversation had ceased, rose up in her place, but made no advance towards him, and said nothing. Mr. Dombey, with a lofty gallantry adapted to his dignity and the occasion, betook his creaking boots towards her, put her hand to his lips, said, "To-morrow morning I shall have the happiness of claiming this hand as Mrs. Dombey's," and bowed himself solemnly out.

Mrs. Skewton rang for candles as soon as the house-door had closed upon him. With the candles appeared her maid, with the juvenile dress that was to delude the world to-morrow. The dress had savage retribution in it, as such dresses ever have, and made her infinitely older and more hideous than her greasy flannel gown. But Mrs. Skewton tried it on with mincing satisfaction; smirked at her cadaverous self in the glass, as she thought of its killing effect upon the Major; and suffering her maid to take it off again, and to prepare her for repose, tumbled into ruins like a house of painted cards.

All this time, Edith remained at the dark window looking out into the street. When she and her mother were at last left alone, she moved from it for the first time that evening, and came op-

posite to her. The yawning, shaking, peevish figure of the mother, with her eyes raised to confront the proud erect form of the daughter, whose glance of fire was bent downward upon her, had a conscious air upon it, that no levity or temper could conceal.

"I am tired to death," said she. "You can't be trusted for a moment. You are worse than a child. Child! No child would be half so obstinate and undutiful."

"Listen to me, mother," returned Edith, passing these words by with a scorn that would not descend to trifle with them. "You must remain alone here until I return."

"Must remain alone here, Edith, until you return!" repeated her mother.

"Or in that name upon which I shall call to-morrow to witness what I do, so falsely, and so shamefully, I swear I will refuse the hand of this man in the church. If I do not, may I fall dead upon the pavement!"

The mother answered with a look of quick alarm, in no degree diminished by the look she met.

"It is enough," said Edith, steadily, "that we are what we are. I will have no youth and truth dragged down to my level. I will have no guileless nature undermined, corrupted, and perverted, to amuse the leisure of a world of mothers. You know my meaning. Florence must go home."

"You are an idiot, Edith," cried her angry mother. "Do you expect there can ever be peace for you in that house, till she is married, and away?"

"Ask me, or ask yourself, if I ever expect peace in that house," said her daughter, "and you know the answer."

"And am I to be told to-night, after all my pains and labour, and when you are going, through me, to be rendered independent," her mother almost shrieked in her passion, while her palsied head shook like a leaf, "that there is corruption and conta-

gion in me, and that I am not fit company for a girl! What are you, pray? What are you?"

"I have put the question to myself," said Edith, ashy pale, and pointing to the window, "more than once when I have been sitting there, and something in the faded likeness of my sex has wandered past outside; and God knows I have met with my reply. Oh mother, mother, if you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl — a younger girl than Florence — how different I might have been!"

Sensible that any show of anger was useless here, her mother restrained herself, and fell a whimpering, and bewailed that she had lived too long, and that her only child had cast her off, and that duty towards parents was forgotten in these evil days, and that she had heard unnatural taunts, and cared for life no longer.

"If one is to go on living through continual scenes like this," she whined, "I am sure it would be much better for me to think of some means of putting an end to my existence. Oh! The idea of your being my daughter, Edith, and addressing me in such a strain!"

"Between us, mother," returned Edith, mournfully, "the time for mutual reproaches is past."

"Then why do you revive it?" whimpered her mother. "You know that you are lacerating me in the cruellest manner. You know how sensitive I am to unkindness. At such a moment too, when I have so much to think of, and am naturally anxious to appear to the best advantage! I wonder at you, Edith. To make your mother a frigh upon your wedding-day!"

Edith bent the same fixed look upon her, as she sobbed and rubbed her eyes; and said in the same low steady voice, which had neither risen nor fallen since she first addressed her, "I have said that Florence must go home."

"Let her go!" cried the afflicted and affrighted parent,

hastily. "I am sure I am willing she should go. What is the girl to me?"

"She is so much to me, that rather than communicate, or suffer to be communicated to her, one grain of the evil that is in my breast, mother, I would renounce you, as I would (if you gave me cause) renounce him in the church to-morrow," replied Edith. "Leave her alone. She shall not, while I can interpose, be tampered with and tainted by the lessons I have learned. This is no hard condition on this bitter night."

"If you had proposed it in a filial manner, Edith," whined her mother, "perhaps not; very likely not. But such extremely cutting words —"

"They are past and at an end between us, now," said Edith. "Take your own way, mother; share as you please in what you have gained; spend, enjoy, make much of it; and be as happy as you will. The object of our lives is won. Henceforth let us wear it silently. My lips are closed upon the past, from this hour. I forgive you your part in to-morrow's wickedness. May God forgive my own!"

Without a tremor in her voice, or frame, and passing onward with a foot that set itself upon the neck of every soft emotion, she bade her mother good night, and repaired to her own room.

But not to rest; for there was no rest in the tumult of her agitation when alone. To and fro, and to and fro, and to and fro again, five hundred times, among the splendid preparations for her adornment on the morrow; with her dark hair shaken down, her dark eyes flashing with a raging light, her broad white bosom red with the cruel grasp of the relentless hand with which she spurned it from her, pacing up and down with an averted head, as if she would avoid the sight of her own fair person, and divorce herself from its companionship. Thus, in the dead time of the night before her bridal, Edith Granger

wrestled with her unquiet spirit, tearless, friendless, silent, proud, and uncomplaining.

At length it happened that she touched the open door which led into the room where Florence lay.

She started, stopped, and looked in.

A light was burning there, and showed her Florence in her bloom of innocence and beauty, fast asleep. Edith held her breath, and felt herself drawn on towards her.

Drawn nearer, nearer, nearer yet; at last, drawn so near, that stooping down, she pressed her lips to the gentle hand that lay outside the bed, and put it softly to her neck. Its touch was like the prophet's rod of old, upon the rock. Her tears sprung forth beneath it, as she sunk upon her knees, and laid her aching head and streaming hair upon the pillow by its side.

Thus Edith Granger passed the night before her bridal. Thus the sun found her on her bridal morning.

CHAPTER XI.

The wedding.

DAWN, with its passionless blank face, steals shivering to the church beneath which lies the dust of little Paul and his mother, and looks in at the windows. It is cold and dark. Night crouches yet, upon the pavement, and broods, sombre and heavy, in nooks and corners of the building. The steeple-clock, perched up above the houses, emerging from beneath another of the countless ripples in the tide of time that regularly roll and break on the eternal shore, is greyly visible, like a stone beacon, recording how the sea flows on; but within doors, dawn, at first, can only peep at night, and see that it is there.

Hovering feebly round the church, and looking in, dawn moans and weeps for its short reign, and its tears trickle on the window-glass, and the trees against the church-wall bow their

heads, and wring their many hands in sympathy. Night, growing pale before it, gradually fades out of the church, but lingers in the vaults below, and sits upon the coffins. And now comes bright day, burnishing the steeple-clock, and reddening the spire, and drying up the tears of dawn, and stifling its complaining; and the scared dawn, following the night, and chasing it from its last refuge, shrinks into the vaults itself and hides, with a frightened face, among the dead, until night returns, refreshed, to drive it out.

And now, the mice, who have been busier with the prayer-books than their proper owners, and with the hassocks, more worn by their little teeth than by human knees, hide their bright eyes in their holes, and gather close together in affright at the resounding clashing of the church-door. For the beadle, that man of power, comes early this morning with the sexton; and Mrs. Miff, the wheezy little pew-opener — a mighty dry old lady, sparely dressed, with not an inch of fulness anywhere about her — is also here, and has been waiting at the church-gate half-an-hour, as her place is, for the beadle.

A vinegary face has Mrs. Miff, and a mortified bonnet, and eke a thirsty soul for sixpences and shillings. Beckoning to stray people to come into pews, has given Mrs. Miff an air of mystery; and there is reservation in the eye of Mrs. Miff, as always knowing of a softer seat, but having her suspicions of the fee. There is no such fact as Mr. Miff, nor has there been, these twenty years, and Mrs. Miff would rather not allude to him. He held some bad opinions, it would seem, about free-seats; and though Mrs. Miff hopes he may be gone upwards, she couldn't positively undertake to say so.

Busy is Mrs. Miff this morning at the church-door, beating and dusting the altar cloth, the carpet, and the cushions; and much has Mrs. Miff to say, about the wedding they are going to have. Mrs. Miff is told, that the new furniture and alterations

in the house cost full five thousand pound if they cost a penny; and Mrs. Miff has heard, upon the best authority, that the lady hasn't got a sixpence wherewithal to bless herself. Mrs. Miff remembers, likewise, as if it had happened yesterday, the first wife's funeral, and then the christening, and then the other funeral; and Mrs. Miff says, by-the-bye she'll soap-and-water that 'ere tablet presently, against the company arrive. Mr. Sownds the Beadle, who is sitting in the sun upon the church steps all this time (and seldom does anything else, except, in cold weather, sitting by the fire), approves of Mrs. Miff's discourse, and asks if Mrs. Miff has heard it said, that the lady is uncommon handsome? The information Mrs. Miff has received, being of this nature, Mr. Sownds the Beadle, who, though orthodox and corpulent, is still an admirer of female beauty, observes, with unction, yes, he hears she is a spanker — an expression that seems somewhat forcible to Mrs. Miff, or would, from any lips but those of Mr. Sownds the Beadle.

In Mr. Dombey's house, at this same time, there is great stir and bustle, more especially among the women: not one of whom has had a wink of sleep since four o'clock, and all of whom were full dressed before six. Mr. Towlinson is an object of greater consideration than usual to the housemaid, and the cook says at breakfast-time that one wedding makes many, which the housemaid can't believe, and don't think true at all. Mr. Towlinson reserves his sentiments on this question; being rendered something gloomy by the engagement of a foreigner with whiskers (Mr. Towlinson is whiskerless himself), who has been hired to accompany the happy pair to Paris, and who is busy packing the new chariot. In respect of this personage, Mr. Towlinson admits, presently, that he never knew of any good that ever come of foreigners; and being charged by the ladies with prejudice, says, look at Bonaparte who was at the head of 'em, and see what *he* was always up to! Which the housemaid says is very true.

The pastry-cook is hard at work in the funereal room in Brook-street, and the very tall young men are busy looking on. One of the very tall young men already smells of sherry, and his eyes have a tendency to become fixed in his head, and to stare at objects without seeing them. The very tall young man is conscious of this failing in himself; and informs his comrade that it's his "exciseman." The very tall young man would say excitement, but his speech is hazy.

The men who play the bells, have got scent of the marriage; and the marrow-bones and cleavers too; and a brass band too. The first, are practising in a back settlement near Battlebridge; the second, put themselves in communication, through their chief, with Mr. Towlinson, to whom they offer terms to be bought off; and the third, in the person of an artful trombone, lurks and dodges round the corner, waiting for some traitor tradesman to reveal the place and hour of breakfast, for a bribe. Expectation and excitement extend further yet, and take a wider range. From Balls Pond, Mr. Perch brings Mrs. Perch to spend the day with Mr. Dombey's servants, and accompany them, surreptitiously, to see the wedding. In Mr. Toots's lodgings, Mr. Toots attires himself as if he were at least the Bridegroom: determined to behold the spectacle in splendour from a secret corner of the gallery, and thither to convey the Chicken: for it is Mr. Toots's desperate intent to point out Florence to the Chicken, then and there, and openly to say, "Now, Chicken, I will not deceive you any longer; the friend I have sometimes mentioned to you is myself; Miss Dombey is the object of my passion; what are your opinions, Chicken, in this state of things, and what, on the spot, do you advise?" The so-much-to-be-astonished Chicken, in the meanwhile, dips his beak into a tankard of strong beer, in Mr. Toots's kitchen, and pecks up two pounds of beefsteaks. In Princess's Place, Miss Tox is up and doing; for she too, though in sore distress, is resolved to put a shilling

in the hands of Mrs. Miff, and see the ceremony which has a cruel fascination for her, from some lonely corner. The quarters of the Wooden Midshipman are all alive; for Captain Cuttle, in his ankle-jacks and with a huge shirt-collar, is seated at his breakfast, listening to Rob the Grinder as he reads the marriage service to him beforehand, under orders, to the end that the Captain may perfectly understand the solemnity he is about to witness: for which purpose, the Captain gravely lays injunctions on his chaplain, from time to time, to "put about," or to "overhaul that 'ere article again," or to stick to his own duty, and leave the Amens to him, the Captain: one of which he repeats, whenever a pause is made by Rob the Grinder, with sonorous satisfaction.

Besides all this, and much more, twenty nursery maids in Mr. Dombey's street alone, have promised twenty families of little women, whose instinctive interest in nuptials dates from their cradles, that they shall go and see the marriage. Truly, Mr. Sownds the Beadle has good reason to feel himself in office, as he suns his portly figure on the church steps, waiting for the marriage hour. Truly, Mrs. Miff has cause to pounce on an unlucky dwarf child, with a giant baby, who peeps in at the porch, and drive her forth with indignation!

Cousin Feenix has come over from abroad, expressly to attend the marriage. Cousin Feenix was a man about town, forty years ago: but he is still so juvenile in figure and in manner, and so well got up, that strangers are amazed when they discover latent wrinkles in his lordship's face, and crows' feet in his eyes; and first observe him, not exactly certain when he walks across a room, of going quite straight to where he wants to go. But Cousin Feenix, getting up at half-past seven o'clock or so, is quite another thing from Cousin Feenix got up; and very dim, indeed, he looks, while being shaved at Long's Hotel, in Bond-street.

Mr. Dombey leaves his dressing-room, amidst a general whisking away of the women on the staircase, who disperse in all directions, with a great rustling of skirts, except Mrs. Perch, who, being (but that she always is) in an interesting situation, is not nimble, and is obliged to face him, and is ready to sink with confusion as she curtseys; — may Heaven avert all evil consequences from the house of Perch! Mr. Dombey walks up to the drawing-room, to bide his time. Gorgeous are Mr. Dombey's new blue coat, fawn-coloured pantaloons, and lilac waistcoat; and a whisper goes about the house, that Mr. Dombey's hair is curled.

A double knock announces the arrival of the Major, who is gorgeous too, and wears a whole geranium in his button-hole, and has his hair curled tight and crisp, as well the Native knows.

"Dombey!" says the Major, putting out both hands, "How are you?"

"Major," says Mr. Dombey, "how are You!"

"By Jove, Sir," says the Major, "Joey B. is in such case this morning, Sir," — and here he hits himself hard upon the breast — "in such case this morning, Sir, that, damme, Dombey, he has half a mind to make a double marriage of it, Sir, and take the mother."

Mr. Dombey smiles; but faintly, even for him; for Mr. Dombey feels that he is going to be related to the mother, and that, under those circumstances, she is not to be joked about.

"Dombey," says the Major, seeing this, "I give you joy. I congratulate you, Dombey. By the Lord, Sir," says the Major, "you are more to be envied, this day, than any man in England!"

Here again, Mr. Dombey's assent is qualified; because he is

going to confer a great distinction on a lady; and, no doubt, she is to be envied most.

"As to Edith Granger, Sir," pursues the Major, "there is not a woman in all Europe but might — and would, Sir, you will allow Bagstock to add — and would — give her ears, and her ear-rings, too, to be in Edith Granger's place."

"You are good enough to say so, Major," says Mr. Dombey.

"Dombey," returns the Major, "you know it. Let us have no false delicacy. You know it. Do you know it, or do you not, Dombey?" says the Major, almost in a passion.

"Oh, really, Major —"

"Damme, Sir," retorts the Major, "do you know that fact, or do you not? Dombey! Is old Joe your friend? Are we on that footing of unreserved intimacy, Dombey, that may justify a man — a blunt old Joseph B., Sir — in speaking out; or am I to take open order, Dombey, and to keep my distance, and to stand on forms?"

"My dear Major Bagstock," says Mr. Dombey, with a gratified air, "you are quite warm."

"By Gad, Sir," says the Major, "I am warm. Joseph B. does not deny it, Dombey. He is warm. This is an occasion, Sir, that calls forth all the honest sympathies remaining in an old, infernal, battered, used-up, invalided, J. B. carcase. And I tell you what, Dombey — at such a time a man must blurt out what he feels, or put a muzzle on; and Joseph Bagstock tells you to your face, Dombey, as he tells his club behind your back, that he never will be muzzled when Paul Dombey is in question. Now, damme, Sir," concludes the Major, with great firmness, "what do you make of that?"

"Major," says Mr. Dombey, "I assure you that I am really obliged to you. I had no idea of checking your too partial friendship."

“Not too partial, Sir!” exclaims the choleric Major. “Dombey, I deny it!”

“Your friendship I will say then,” pursues Mr. Dombey, “on any account. Nor can I forget, Major, on such an occasion as the present, how much I am indebted to it.”

“Dombey,” says the Major, with appropriate action, “that is the hand of Joseph Bagstock: of plain old Joey B., Sir, if you like that better! That is the hand, of which His Royal Highness the late Duke of York did me the honour to observe, Sir, to his Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent, that it was the hand of Josh.: a rough and tough, and possibly an up-to-snuff, old vagabond. Dombey, may the present moment be the least unhappy of our lives. God bless you!”

Now, enters Mr. Carker, gorgeous likewise, and smiling like a wedding-guest indeed. He can scarcely let Mr. Dombey’s hand go, he is so congratulatory; and he shakes the Major’s hand so heartily at the same time, that his voice shakes too, in accord with his arms, as it comes sliding from between his teeth.

“The very day is auspicious,” says Mr. Carker. “The brightest and most genial weather! I hope I am not a moment late?”

“Punctual to your time, Sir,” says the Major.

“I am rejoiced, I am sure,” says Mr. Carker. “I was afraid I might be a few seconds after the appointed time, for I was delayed by a procession of wagons; and I took the liberty of riding round to Brookstreet” — this to Mr. Dombey — “to leave a few poor rarities of flowers for Mrs. Dombey. A man in my position, and so distinguished as to be invited here, is proud to offer some homage in acknowledgment of his vassalage: and as I have no doubt Mrs. Dombey is overwhelmed with what is costly and magnificent;” with a strange glance at his patron; “I hope the very poverty of my offering, may find favour for it.”

“Mrs. Dombey, that is to be,” returns Mr. Dombey, con-

descendingly, "will be very sensible of your attention, Carker, I am sure."

"And if she is to be Mrs. Dombey this morning, Sir," says the Major, putting down his coffee-cup, and looking at his watch, "it's high time we were off!"

Forth, in a barouche, ride Mr. Dombey, Major Bagstock, and Mr. Carker, to the church. Mr. Sownds the Beadle has long risen from the steps, and is in waiting with his cocked hat in his hand. Mrs. Miff curtseys and proposes chairs in the vestry. Mr. Dombey prefers remaining in the church. As he looks up at the organ, Miss Tox in the gallery shrinks behind the fat leg of a cherubim on a monument, with cheeks like a young Wind. Captain Cuttle, on the contrary, stands up and waves his hook, in token of welcome and encouragement. Mr. Toots informs the Chicken, behind his hand, that the middle gentleman, he in the fawn-coloured pantaloons, is the father of his love. The Chicken hoarsely whispers Mr. Toots that he's as stiff a cove as ever he see, but that it is within the resources of Science to double him up, with one blow in the waistcoat.

Mr. Sownds and Mrs. Miff are eyeing Mr. Dombey from a little distance, when the noise of approaching wheels is heard, and Mr. Sownds goes out. Mrs. Miff, meeting Mr. Dombey's eye as it is withdrawn from the presumptuous maniac up-stairs, who salutes him with so much urbanity, drops a curtsey, and informs him that she believes his "good lady" is come. Then, there is a crowding and a whispering at the door, and the good lady enters, with a haughty step.

There is no sign upon her face, of last night's suffering; there is no trace in her manner, of the woman on the bended knees, reposing her wild head, in beautiful abandonment, upon the pillow of the sleeping girl. That girl, all gentle and lovely, is at her side — a striking contrast to her own disdainful and defiant figure, standing there, composed, erect, inscrutable of will,

resplendent and majestic in the zenith of its charms, yet beating down, and treading on, the admiration that it challenges.

There is a pause while Mr. Sownds the Beadle glides into the vestry for the clergyman and clerk. At this juncture, Mrs. Skewton speaks to Mr. Dombey: more distinctly and emphatically than her custom is, and moving, at the same time, close to Edith.

"My dear Dombey," says the good Mama, "I fear I must relinquish darling Florence after all, and suffer her to go home, as she herself proposed. After my loss of to-day, my dear Dombey, I feel I shall not have spirits, even for her society."

"Had she not better stay with you?" returns the Bridegroom.

"I think not, my dear Dombey. No, I think not. I shall be better alone. Besides, my dearest Edith will be her natural and constant guardian when you return, and I had better not encroach upon her trust, perhaps. She might be jealous. Eh, dear Edith?"

The affectionate Mama presses her daughter's arm, as she says this; perhaps entreating her attention earnestly.

"To be serious, my dear Dombey," she resumes, "I will relinquish our dear child, and not inflict my gloom upon her. We have settled that, just now. She fully understands, dear Dombey. Edith, my dear, — she fully understands."

Again, the good mother presses her daughter's arm. Mr. Dombey offers no additional remonstrance; for the clergyman and clerk appear; and Mrs. Miff, and Mr. Sownds the Beadle, group the party in their proper places at the altar rails.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Cousin Feenix does that. He has come from Baden-Baden on purpose. "Confound it," Cousin Feenix says — good-natured creature, Cousin Feenix — "when we *do* get a rich city fellow into the family, let us show him some attention; let us do something for him."

"I give this woman to be married to this man," saith Cousin

Feenix therefore. Cousin Feenix, meaning to go in a straight line, but turning off sideways by reason of his wilful legs, gives the wrong woman to be married to this man, at first — to wit, a bridesmaid of some condition, distantly connected with the family, and ten years Mrs. Skewton's junior — but Mrs. Miff, interposing her mortified bonnet, dexterously turns him back, and runs him, as on castors, full at the "good lady:" whom Cousin Feenix giveth to be married to this man accordingly.

And will they in the sight of heaven —?

Aye, that they will: Mr. Dombey says he will. And what says Edith? *She* will.

So, from that day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do them part, they plight their troth to one another, and are married.

In a firm, free hand, the Bride subscribes her name in the register, when they adjourn to the vestry. "There an't a many ladies comes here," Mrs. Miff says with a curtsy — to look at Mrs. Miff, at such a season, is to make her mortified bonnet go down with a dip — "writes their names like this good lady!" Mr. Sownds the Beadle thinks it is a truly spanking signature, and worthy of the writer — this, however, between himself and conscience.

Florence signs too, but unapplauded, for her hand shakes. All the party sign; Cousin Feenix last; who puts his noble name into a wrong place, and enrols himself as having been born, that morning.

The Major now salutes the Bride right gallantly, and carries out that branch of military tactics in reference to all the ladies: notwithstanding Mrs. Skewton's being extremely hard to kiss, and squeaking shrilly in the sacred edifice. The example is followed by Cousin Feenix, and even by Mr. Dombey. Lastly, Mr. Carker, with his white teeth glistening, approaches Edith,

more as if he meant to bite her, than to taste the sweets that linger on her lips.

There is a glow upon her proud cheek, and a flashing in her eyes, that may be meant to stay him; but it does not, for he salutes her as the rest have done, and wishes her all happiness.

"If wishes," says he in a low voice, "are not superfluous, applied to such a union."

"I thank you, Sir," she answers, with a curled lip, and a heaving bosom.

But, does Edith feel still, as on the night when she knew that Mr. Dombey would return to offer his alliance, that Carker knows her thoroughly, and reads her right, and that she is more degraded by his knowledge of her, than by aught else? Is it for this reason that her haughtiness shrinks beneath his smile, like snow within the hand that grasps it firmly, and that her imperious glance droops in meeting his, and seeks the ground?

"I am proud to see," says Mr. Carker, with a servile stooping of his neck, which the revelations making by his eyes and teeth proclaim to be a lie, "I am proud to see that my humble offering is graced by Mrs. Dombey's hand, and permitted to hold so favoured a place in so joyful an occasion."

Though she bends her head, in answer, there is something in the momentary action of her hand, as if she would crush the flowers it holds, and fling them, with contempt, upon the ground. But, she puts the hand through the arm of her new husband, who has been standing near, conversing with the Major, and is proud again, and motionless, and silent.

The carriages are once more at the church door. Mr. Dombey, with his bride upon his arm, conducts her through the twenty families of little women who are on the steps, and every one of whom remembers the fashion and the colour of her every article of dress from that moment, and reproduces it on her doll, who is for ever being married. Cleopatra and Cousin Feenix

enter the same carriage. The Major hands into a second carriage, Florence, and the bridesmaid who so narrowly escaped being given away by mistake, and then enters it himself, and is followed by Mr. Carker. Horses prance and caper; coachmen and footmen shine in fluttering favours, flowers, and new-made liveries. Away they dash and rattle through the streets; and as they pass along, a thousand heads are turned to look at them, and a thousand sober moralists revenge themselves for not being married too, that morning, by reflecting that these people little think such happiness can't last.

Miss Tox emerges from behind the cherubim's leg, when all is quiet, and comes slowly down, from the gallery. Miss Tox's eyes are red, and her pocket-handkerchief is damp. She is wounded, but not exasperated, and she hopes they may be happy. She quite admits to herself the beauty of the bride, and her own comparatively feeble and faded attractions; but the stately image of Mr. Dombey in his lilac waistcoat, and his fawn-coloured pantaloons, is present to her mind, and Miss Tox weeps afresh, behind her veil, on her way home to Princess's Place. Captain Cuttle, having joined in all the amens and responses, with a devout growl, feels much improved by his religious exercises; and in a peaceful frame of mind pervades the body of the church, glazed hat in hand, and reads the tablet to the memory of little Paul. The gallant Mr. Toots, attended by the faithful Chicken, leaves the building in torments of love. The Chicken is as yet unable to elaborate a scheme for winning Florence, but his first idea has gained possession of him, and he thinks the doubling up of Mr. Dombey would be a move in the right direction. Mr. Dombey's servants come out of their hiding-places, and prepare to rush to Brook Street, when they are delayed by symptoms of indisposition on the part of Mrs. Perch, who entreates a glass of water, and becomes alarming; Mrs. Perch gets better soon, however, and is borne away; and Mrs. Miff, and Mr.

Sownds the Beadle, sit upon the steps to count what they have gained by the affair, and talk it over, while the sexton tolls a funeral.

Now, the carriages arrive at the Bride's residence, and the players on the bells begin to jingle, and the band strikes up, and Mr. Punch, that model of connubial bliss, salutes his wife. Now, the people run, and push, and press round in a gaping throng, while Mr. Dombey, leading Mrs. Dombey by the hand, advances solemnly into the Feenix Halls. Now, the rest of the wedding party alight, and enter after them. And why does Mr. Carker, passing through the people to the hall-door, think of the old woman who called to him in the grove that morning? Or why does Florence, as she passes, think, with a tremble, of her childhood, when she was lost, and of the visage of good Mrs. Brown?

Now, there are more congratulations on this happiest of days, and more company, though not much; and now they leave the drawing-room, and range themselves at table in the dark-brown dining-room, which no confectioner can brighten up, let him garnish the exhausted negroes with as many flowers and love-knots as he will.

The pastry-cook has done his duty like a man, though, and a rich breakfast is set forth. Mr. and Mrs. Chick have joined the party, among others. Mrs. Chick admires that Edith should be, by nature, such a perfect Dombey; and is affable and confidential to Mrs. Skewton, whose mind is relieved of a great load, and who takes her share of the champagne. The very tall young man who suffered from excitement early, is better; but a vague sentiment of repentance has seized upon him, and he hates the other very tall young man, and wrests dishes from him by violence, and takes a grim delight in disobliging the company. The company are cool and calm, and do not outrage the black hatchments of pictures looking down upon them, by any excess of mirth.

Cousin Feenix and the Major are the gayest there; but Mr. Carker has a smile for the whole table. He has an especial smile for the Bride, who very, very, seldom meets it.

Cousin Feenix rises, when the company have breakfasted, and the servants have left the room; and wonderfully young he looks, with his white wristbands almost covering his hands (otherwise rather bony), and the bloom of the champagne in his cheeks.

“Upon my honour,” says Cousin Feenix, “although it’s an unusual sort of thing in a private gentleman’s house, I must beg leave to call upon you to drink what is usually called a — in fact a toast.”

The Major very hoarsely indicates approval. Mr. Carker, bending his head forward over the table in the direction of Cousin Feenix, smiles and nods a great many times.

“A — in fact it’s not a —” Cousin Feenix beginning again, thus, comes to a dead stop.

“Hear, hear!” says the Major, in a tone of conviction.

Mr. Carker softly claps his hands, and bending forward over the table again, smiles and nods a great many more times than before, as if he were particularly struck by this last observation, and desired personally to express his sense of the good it has done him.

“It is,” says Cousin Feenix, “an occasion, in fact, when the general usages of life may be a little departed from, without impropriety; and although I never was an orator in my life, and when I was in the House of Commons, and had the honour of seconding the address, was — in fact, was laid up for a fortnight with the consciousness of failure —”

The Major and Mr. Carker are so much delighted by this fragment of personal history, that Cousin Feenix laughs, and addressing them, individually, goes on to say:

“And in point of fact, when I was devilish ill — still, you

know, I feel that a duty devolves upon me. And when a duty devolves upon an Englishman, he is bound to get out of it, in my opinion, in the best way he can. Well! our family has had the gratification, to-day, of connecting itself, in the person of my lovely and accomplished relative, whom I now see — in point of fact, present —”

Here there is general applause.

“Present,” repeats Cousin Feenix, feeling that it is a neat point which will bear repetition, — “with one who — that is to say, with a man, at whom the finger of scorn can never — in fact, with my honourable friend Dombey, if he will allow me to call him so.”

Cousin Feenix bows to Mr. Dombey; Mr. Dombey solemnly returns the bow; everybody is more or less gratified and affected by this extraordinary, and perhaps unprecedented, appeal to the feelings.

“I have not,” says Cousin Feenix, “enjoyed those opportunities which I could have desired, of cultivating the acquaintance of my friend Dombey, and studying those qualities which do equal honour to his head, and, in point of fact, to his heart; for it has been my misfortune to be, as we used to say in my time in the House of Commons, when it was not the custom to allude to the Lords, and when the order of parliamentary proceedings was perhaps better observed than it is now — to be in — in point of fact,” says Cousin Feenix, cherishing his joke, with great slyness, and finally bringing it out with a jerk, “‘in another place!’”

The Major falls into convulsions, and is recovered with difficulty.

“But I know sufficient of my friend Dombey,” resumes Cousin Feenix in a graver tone, as if he had suddenly become a sadder and a wiser man, “to know that he is, in point of fact, what may be emphatically called a — a merchant — a British

merchant — and a — and a man. And although I have been resident abroad, for some years (it would give me great pleasure to receive my friend Dombey, and everybody here, at Baden-Baden, and to have an opportunity of making 'em known to the Grand Duke), still I know enough, I flatter myself, of my lovely and accomplished relative, to know that she possesses every requisite to make a man happy, and that her marriage with my friend Dombey is one of inclination and affection on both sides."

Many smiles and nods from Mr. Carker.

"Therefore," says Cousin Feenix, "I congratulate the family of which I am a member, on the acquisition of my friend Dombey. I congratulate my friend Dombey on his union with my lovely and accomplished relative who possesses every requisite to make a man happy; and I take the liberty of calling on you all, in point of fact, to congratulate both my friend Dombey and my lovely and accomplished relative, on the present occasion."

The speech of Cousin Feenix is received with great applause, and Mr. Dombey returns thanks on behalf of himself and Mrs. Dombey. J. B. shortly afterwards proposes Mrs. Skewton. The breakfast languishes when that is done, the violated hatchments are avenged, and Edith rises to assume her travelling dress.

All the servants, in the meantime, have been breakfasting below. Champagne has grown too common among them to be mentioned, and roast fowls, raised pies, and lobster salad, have become mere drugs. The very tall young man has recovered his spirits, and again alludes to the exciseman. His comrade's eye begins to emulate his own, and he, too, stares at objects, without taking cognizance thereof. There is a general redness in the faces of the ladies; in the face of Mrs. Perch particularly, who is joyous and beaming, and lifted so far above the cares of life, that if she were asked just now to direct a wayfarer to Ball's Pond, where her own cares lodge, she would have some diffi-

culty in recalling the way. Mr. Towlinson has proposed the happy pair; to which the silver-headed butler has responded neatly, and with emotion; for he half begins to think he is an old retainer of the family, and that he is bound to be affected by these changes. The whole party, and especially the ladies, are very frolicsome. Mr. Dombey's cook, who generally takes the lead in society, has said, it is impossible to settle down after this, and why not go, in a party, to the play? Everybody (Mrs. Perch included) has agreed to this; even the Native, who is tigerish in his drink, and who alarms the ladies (Mrs. Perch particularly) by the rolling of his eyes. One of the very tall young men has even proposed a ball after the play, and it presents itself to no one (Mrs. Perch included) in the light of an impossibility. Words have arisen between the housemaid and Mr. Towlinson; she, on the authority of an old saw, asserting marriages to be made in Heaven: he, affecting to trace the manufacture elsewhere; he, supposing that she says so, because she thinks of being married her own self: she, saying, Lord forbid, at any rate, that she should ever marry *him*. To calm these flying taunts, the silver-headed butler rises to propose the health of Mr. Towlinson, whom to know is to esteem, and to esteem is to wish well settled in life with the object of his choice, wherever (here the silver-headed butler eyes the housemaid) she may be. Mr. Towlinson returns thanks in a speech replete with feeling, of which the peroration turns on foreigners, regarding whom, he says they may find favour, sometimes, with weak and inconstant intellects that can be led away by hair, but all he hopes, is, he may never hear of no foreigner never boning nothing out of no travelling chariot. The eye of Mr. Towlinson is so severe and so expressive here, that the housemaid is turning hysterical, when she and all the rest, roused by the intelligence that the Bride is going away, hurry up stairs to witness her departure.

The chariot is at the door; the Bride is descending to the hall,

where Mr. Dombey waits for her. Florence is ready on the staircase to depart too; and Miss Nipper, who has held a middle state between the parlour and the kitchen, is prepared to accompany her. As Edith appears, Florence hastens towards her, to bid her farewell.

Is Edith cold, that she should tremble! Is there anything unnatural or unwholesome in the touch of Florence, that the beautiful form recedes and contracts, as if it could not bear it! Is there so much hurry in this going away, that Edith, with a wave of her hand, sweeps on, and is gone!

Mrs. Skewton, overpowered by her feelings as a mother, sinks on her sofa in the Cleopatra attitude, when the clatter of the chariot wheels is lost, and sheds several tears. The Major, coming with the rest of the company from table, endeavours to comfort her; but she will not be comforted on any terms, and so the Major takes his leave. Cousin Feenix takes his leave, and Mr. Carker takes his leave. The guests all go away. Cleopatra, left alone, feels a little giddy from her strong emotion, and falls asleep.

Giddiness prevails below stairs too. The very tall young man whose excitement came on so soon, appears to have his head glued to the table in the pantry, and cannot be detached from it. A violent revulsion has taken place in the spirits of Mrs. Perch, who is low on account of Mr. Perch, and tells cook that she fears he is not so much attached to his home, as he used to be, when they were only nine in family. Mr. Towlinson has a singing in his ears and a large wheel going round and round inside his head. The housemaid wishes it wasn't wicked to wish that one was dead.

There is a general delusion likewise, in these lower regions, on the subject of time; everybody conceiving that it ought to be, at the earliest, ten o'clock at night, whereas it is not yet three in the afternoon. A shadowy idea of wickedness committed, haunts every individual in the party; and each one secretly thinks the

other a companion in guilt, whom it would be agreeable to avoid. No man or woman has the hardihood to hint at the projected visit to the play. Any one reviving the notion of the ball, would be scouted as a malignant idiot.

Mrs. Skewton sleeps up-stairs, two hours afterwards, and naps are not yet over in the kitchen. The hatchments in the dining-room look down on crumbs, dirty plates, spillings of wine, half-thawed ice, stale discoloured heel-taps, scraps of lobster, drumsticks of fowls, and pensive jellies, gradually resolving themselves into a lukewarm gummy soup. The marriage is, by this time, almost as denuded of its show and garnish as the breakfast. Mr. Dombey's servants moralise so much about it, and are so repentant over their early tea, at home, that by eight o'clock or so, they settle down into confirmed seriousness; and Mr. Perch, arriving at that time from the city, fresh and jocular, with a white waistcoat and a comic song, ready to spend the evening, and prepared for any amount of dissipation, is amazed to find himself coldly received, and Mrs. Perch but poorly, and to have the pleasing duty of escorting that lady home by the next omnibus.

Night closes in. Florence, having rambled through the handsome house, from room to room, seeks her own chamber, where the care of Edith has surrounded her with luxuries and comforts; and divesting herself of her handsome dress, puts on her old simple mourning for dear Paul, and sits down to read, with Diogenes winking and blinking on the ground beside her. But Florence cannot read to-night. The house seems strange and new, and there are loud echoes in it. There is a shadow on her heart: she knows not why or what: but it is heavy. Florence shuts her book, and gruff Diogenes, who takes that for a signal, puts his paws upon her lap, and rubs his ears against her caressing hands. But Florence cannot see him plainly, in a little time, for there is a mist between her eyes and him, and her dead

brother and dead mother shine in it like angels. Walter, too, poor wandering shipwrecked boy, oh, where is he!

The Major don't know; that 's for certain; and don't care. The Major, having choked and slumbered, all the afternoon, has taken a late dinner at his club, and now sits over his pint of wine, driving a modest young man, with a fresh-coloured face, at the next table (who would give a handsome sum to be able to rise and go away, but cannot do it) to the verge of madness, by anecdotes of Bagstock, Sir, at Dombey's wedding, and Old Joe's devilish gentlemanly friend, Lord Feenix. While Cousin Feenix, who ought to be at Long's, and in bed, finds himself, instead, at a gaming-table, where his wilful legs have taken him, perhaps, in his own despite.

Night, like a giant, fills the church, from pavement to roof, and holds dominion through the silent hours. Pale dawn again comes peeping through the windows; and, giving place to day, sees night withdraw into the vaults, and follows it, and drives it out, and hides among the dead. The timid mice again cower close together, when the great door clashes, and Mr. Sownds and Mrs. Miff, treading the circle of their daily lives, unbroken as a marriage ring, come in. Again, the cocked hat and the mortified bonnet stand in the back ground at the marriage hour; and again this man taketh this woman, and this woman taketh this man, on the solemn terms:

“To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do them part.”

The very words that Mr. Carker rides into town repeating, with his mouth stretched to the utmost, as he picks his dainty way.

CHAPTER XII.

The wooden midshipman goes to pieces.

HONEST Captain Cuttle, as the weeks flew over him in his fortified retreat, by no means abated any of his prudent provisions against surprise, because of the non-appearance of the enemy. The Captain argued that his present security was too profound and wonderful to endure much longer; he knew that when the wind stood in a fair quarter, the weathercock was seldom nailed there; and he was too well acquainted with the determined and dauntless character of Mrs. Mac Stinger, to doubt that that heroic woman had devoted herself to the task of his discovery and capture. Trembling beneath the weight of these reasons, Captain Cuttle lived a very close and retired life; seldom stirring abroad until after dark; venturing even then only into the obscurest streets; never going forth at all on Sundays; and both within and without the walls of his retreat, avoiding bonnets, as if they were worn by raging lions.

The Captain never dreamed that in the event of his being pounced upon by Mrs. Mac Stinger, in his walks, it would be possible to offer resistance. He felt that it could not be done. He saw himself, in his mind's eye, put meekly into a hackney coach, and carried off to his old lodgings. He foresaw that, once immured there, he was a lost man: his hat gone; Mrs. Mac Stinger watchful of him day and night; reproaches heaped upon his head, before the infant family; himself the guilty object of suspicion and distrust: an ogre in the children's eyes, and in their mother's a detected traitor.

A violent perspiration, and a lowness of spirits, always came over the Captain as this gloomy picture presented itself to his imagination. It generally did so previous to his stealing out of doors at night for air and exercise. Sensible of the risk he ran,

the Captain took leave of Rob, at those times, with the solemnity which became a man who might never return: exhorting him, in the event of his (the Captain's) being lost sight of, for a time, to tread in the paths of virtue, and keep the brazen instruments well polished.

But not to throw away a chance; and to secure to himself a means, in case of the worst, of holding communication with the external world; Captain Cuttle soon conceived the happy idea of teaching Rob the Grinder some secret signal, by which that adherent might make his presence and fidelity known to his commander, in the hour of adversity. After much cogitation, the Captain decided in favour of instructing him to whistle the marine melody, "Oh cheerily, cheerily!" and Rob the Grinder attaining a point as near perfection in that accomplishment as a landsman could hope to reach, the Captain impressed these mysterious instructions on his mind:

"Now, my lad, stand by! If ever I'm took —"

"Took, Captain!" interposed Rob, with his round eyes wide open.

"Ah!" said Captain Cuttle darkly, "if ever I goes away, meaning to come back to supper, and don't come within hail again, twenty-four hours arter my loss, go you to Brig Place and whistle that 'ere tune near my old moorings — not as if you was a meaning of it, you understand, but as if you 'd drifted there, promiscuous. If I answer in that tune, you sheer off, my lad, and come back four-and-twenty hours arterwards; if I answer in another tune, do you stand off and on, and wait till I throw out further signals. Do you understand them orders now?"

"What am I to stand off and on of, Captain?" inquired Rob.
"The horse-road?"

"Here 's a smart lad for you!" cried the Captain, eyeing him sternly, "as don't know his own native alphabet! Go

away a bit and come back again alternate — d'ye understand that?"

"Yes, Captain," said Rob.

"Very good my lad, then," said the Captain, relenting. "Do it!"

That he might do it the better, Captain Cuttle sometimes condescended, of an evening after the shop was shut, to rehearse this scene: retiring into the parlour for the purpose, as into the lodgings of a supposititious Mac Stinger, and carefully observing the behaviour of his ally, from the hole of espial he had cut in the wall. Rob the Grinder discharged himself of his duty with so much exactness and judgment, when thus put to the proof, that the Captain presented him, at divers times, with seven six-pences, in token of satisfaction; and gradually felt stealing over his spirit the resignation of a man who had made provision for the worst, and taken every reasonable precaution against an unrelenting fate.

Nevertheless, the Captain did not tempt ill-fortune, by being a whit more venturesome than before. Though he considered it a point of good breeding in himself, as a general friend of the family, to attend Mr. Dombey's wedding (of which he had heard from Mr. Perch), and to show that gentleman a pleasant and approving countenance from the gallery, he had repaired to the church in a hackney cabriolet with both windows up; and might have scrupled even to make that venture, in his dread of Mrs. Mac Stinger, but that the lady's attendance on the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech rendered it peculiarly unlikely that she would be found in communion with the Establishment.

The Captain got safe home again, and fell into the ordinary routine of his new life, without encountering any more direct alarm from the enemy, than was suggested to him by the daily bonnets in the street. But other subjects began to lie heavy on the Captain's mind. Walter's ship was still unheard of. No

news came of old Sol Gills. Florence did not even know of the old man's disappearance, and Captain Cuttle had not the heart to tell her. Indeed the Captain, as his own hopes of the generous, handsome, gallant-hearted youth, whom he had loved, according to his rough manner, from a child, began to fade, and faded more and more from day to day, shrunk with instinctive pain from the thought of exchanging a word with Florence. If he had had good news to carry to her, the honest Captain would have braved the newly decorated house and splendid furniture — though these, connected with the lady he had seen at church, were awful to him — and made his way into her presence. With a dark horizon gathering around their common hopes, however, that darkened every hour, the Captain almost felt as if he were a new misfortune and affliction to her; and was scarcely less afraid of a visit from Florence, than from Mrs. Mac Stinger herself.

It was a chill dark autumn evening, and Captain Cuttle had ordered a fire to be kindled in the little back parlour, now more than ever like the cabin of a ship. The rain fell fast, and the wind blew hard; and straying out on the house-top by that stormy bedroom of his old friend, to take an observation of the weather, the Captain's heart died within him, when he saw how wild and desolate it was. Not that he associated the weather of that time with poor Walter's destiny, or doubted that if Providence had doomed him to be lost and shipwrecked, it was over, long ago; but that beneath an outward influence, quite distinct from the subject-matter of his thoughts, the Captain's spirits sank, and his hopes turned pale, as those of wiser men had often done before him, and will often do again.

Captain Cuttle, addressing his face to the sharp wind and slanting rain, looked up at the heavy scud that was flying fast over the wilderness of house-tops, and looked for something cheery there in vain. The prospect near at hand was no better.

In sundry tea-chests and other rough boxes at his feet, the pigeons of Rob the Grinder were cooing like so many dismal breezes getting up. A crazy weathercock of a midshipman, with a telescope at his eye, once visible from the street, but long bricked out, creaked and complained upon his rusty pivot as the shrill blast spun him round and round, and sported with him cruelly. Upon the Captain's coarse blue vest the cold rain-drops started like steel beads; and he could hardly maintain himself aslant against the stiff Nor' Wester that came pressing against him, importunate to topple him over the parapet, and throw him on the pavement below. If there were any Hope alive that evening, the Captain thought, as he held his hat on, it certainly kept house, and wasn't out of doors; so the Captain, shaking his head in a despondent manner, went in to look for it.

Captain Cuttle descended slowly to the little back parlour, and, seated in his accustomed chair, looked for it in the fire; but it was not there, though the fire was bright. He took out his tobacco-box and pipe, and composing himself to smoke, looked for it in the red glow from the bowl, and in the wreaths of vapour that curled upward from his lips; but there was not so much as an atom of the rust of Hope's anchor in either. He tried a glass of grog; but melancholy truth was at the bottom of that well, and he couldn't finish it. He made a turn or two in the shop, and looked for Hope among the instruments; but they obstinately worked out reckonings for the missing ship, in spite of any opposition he could offer, that ended at the bottom of the lone sea.

The wind still rushing, and the rain still pattering, against the closed shutters, the Captain brought to before the wooden Midshipman upon the counter, and thought, as he dried the little officer's uniform with his sleeve, how many years the Midshipman had seen, during which few changes — hardly any — had transpired among his ship's company; how the

changes had come all together one day, as it might be; and of what a sweeping kind they were. Here was the little society of the back parlour broken up, and scattered far and wide. Here was no audience for Lovely Peg, even if there had been anybody to sing it, which there was not; for the Captain was as morally certain that nobody but he could execute that ballad, as he was that he had not the spirit, under existing circumstances, to attempt it. There was no bright face of "Wal'r in the house;" — here the Captain transferred his sleeve for a moment from the Midshipman's uniform to his own cheek; — the familiar wig and buttons of Sol Gills were a vision of the past; Richard Whittington was knocked on the head; and every plan and project, in connexion with the Midshipman, lay drifting, without mast or rudder, on the waste of waters.

As the Captain, with a dejected face, stood revolving these thoughts, and polishing the Midshipman, partly in the tenderness of old acquaintance, and partly in the absence of his mind, a knocking at the shop-door communicated a frightful start to the frame of Rob the Grinder, seated on the counter, whose large eyes had been intently fixed on the Captain's face, and who had been debating within himself, for the five hundredth time, whether the Captain could have done a murder, that he had such an evil conscience, and was always running away.

"What's that!" said Captain Cuttle, softly.

"Somebody's knuckles, Captain," answered Rob the Grinder.

The Captain, with an abashed and guilty air, immediately sneaked on tip-toe to the little parlour and locked himself in. Rob, opening the door, would have parleyed with the visitor on the threshold if the visitor had come in female guise; but the figure being of the male sex, and Rob's orders only applying to women, Rob held the door open and allowed it to enter: which it did very quickly, glad to get out of the driving rain.

"A job for Burgess and Co. at any rate," said the visitor looking over his shoulder compassionately at his own legs, which were very wet and covered with splashes. "Oh, how-de-do, Mr. Gills?"

The salutation was addressed to the Captain, now emerging from the back parlour with a most transparent and utterly futile affectation of coming out by accident.

"Thankee," the gentleman went on to say in the same breath; "I'm very well indeed, myself, I'm much obliged to you. My name is Toots, — *Mister Toots*."

The Captain remembered to have seen this young gentleman at the wedding, and made him a bow. Mr. Toots replied with a chuckle; and being embarrassed, as he generally was, breathed hard, shook hands with the Captain for a long time, and then falling on Rob the Grinder, in the absence of any other resource, shook hands with him in a most affectionate and cordial manner.

"I say! I should like to speak a word to you, Mr. Gills, if you please," said Toots at length, with surprising presence of mind. "I say! Miss D. O. M. you know!"

The Captain, with responsive gravity and mystery, immediately waved his hook towards the little parlour, whither Mr. Toots followed him.

"Oh! I beg your pardon though," said Mr. Toots, looking up in the Captain's face as he sat down in a chair by the fire, which the Captain placed for him; "you don't happen to know the Chicken at all; do you Mr. Gills?"

"The Chicken?" said the Captain.

"The Game Chicken," said Mr. Toots.

The Captain shaking his head, Mr. Toots explained that the man alluded to was the celebrated public character who had covered himself and his country with glory in his contest with the

Nobby Shropshire One; but this piece of information did not appear to enlighten the Captain very much.

"Because he 's outside: that 's all," said Mr. Toots. "But it 's of no consequence; he won't get very wet, perhaps."

"I can pass the word for him in a moment," said the Captain.

"Well, if you *would* have the goodness to let him sit in the shop with your young man," chuckled Mr. Toots, "I should be glad; because, you knew, he 's easily offended, and the damp 's rather bad for his stamina. I'll call him in, Mr. Gills."

With that, Mr. Toots repairing to the shop-door, sent a peculiar whistle into the night, which produced a stoical gentleman in a shaggy white great-coat and a flat-brimmed hat, with very short hair, a broken nose, and a considerable tract of bare and sterile country behind each ear.

"Sit down, Chicken," said Mr. Toots.

The compliant Chicken spat out some small pieces of straw on which he was regaling himself, and took in a fresh supply from a reserve he carried in his hand.

"There an't no drain of nothing short handy, is there?" said the Chicken, generally. "This here sluicing night is hard lines to a man as lives on his condition."

Captain Cuttle proffered a glass of rum, which the Chicken, throwing back his head, emptied into himself, as into a cask, after proposing the brief sentiment "Towards us!" Mr. Toots and the Captain returning then to the parlour, and taking their seats before the fire, Mr. Toots began:

"Mr. Gills —"

"Awast!" said the Captain. "My name 's Cuttle."

Mr. Toots looked greatly disconcerted, while the Captain proceeded gravely.

"Cap'en Cuttle is my name, and England is my nation, this here is my dwelling place, and blessed be creation — Job," said the Captain, as an index to his authority.

"Oh! I couldn't see Mr. Gills, could I?" said Mr. Toots; "because —"

"If you could see Sol Gills, young gen'l'm'n," said the Captain, impressively, and laying his heavy hand on Mr. Toots's knee, "old Sol, mind you — with your own eyes — as you sit there — you'd be welcomer to me, than a wind astarn, to a ship becalmed. But you can't see Sol Gills. And why can't you see Sol Gills?" said the Captain, apprised by the face of Mr. Toots that he was making a profound impression on that gentleman's mind. "Because he's invisible."

Mr. Toots in his agitation was going to reply that it was of no consequence at all. But he corrected himself, and said, "Lor bless me!"

"That there man," said the Captain, "has left me in charge here by a piece of writing, but though he was a'most as good as my sworn brother, I know no more where he's gone, or why he's gone; if so be to seek his nevy, or if so be along of being not quite settled in his mind; than you do. One morning at day-break he went over the side," said the Captain, "without a splash, without a ripple. I have looked for that man high and low, and never set eyes, nor ears, nor nothing else, upon him from that hour."

"But, good gracious, Miss Dombey don't know —" Mr. Toots began.

"Why, I ask you as a feeling heart," said the Captain, dropping his voice, "why should she know? why should she be made to know, until such time as there warn't any help for it? She took to old Sol Gills, did that sweet creetur, with a kindness, with a affability, with a — what's the good of saying so? you know her."

"I should hope so," chuckled Mr. Toots, with a conscious blush that suffused his whole countenance.

"And you come here from her?" said the Captain.

"I should think so," chuckled Mr. Toots.

"Then all I need observe, is," said the Captain, "that you know a angel, and are chartered *by* a angel."

Mr. Toots instantly seized the Captain's hand, and requested the favour of his friendship.

"Upon my word and honour," said Mr. Toots, earnestly, "I should be very much obliged to you if you 'd improve my acquaintance. I should like to know you, Captain, very much. I really am in want of a friend, I am. Little Dombey was my friend at old Blimber's, and would have been now, if he 'd have lived. The Chicken," said Mr. Toots, in a forlorn whisper, "is very well — admirable in his way — the sharpest man perhaps in the world; there's not a move he isn't up to, everybody says so — but I don't know — he's not everything. So she is an angel, Captain. If there is an angel anywhere, it's Miss Dombey. That's what I've always said. Really though, you know," said Mr. Toots, "I should be very much obliged to you if you 'd cultivate my acquaintance."

Captain Cuttle received this proposal in a polite manner, but still without committing himself to its acceptance; merely observing "Aye aye, my lad. We shall see, we shall see;" and reminding Mr. Toots of his immediate mission, by inquiring to what he was indebted for the honour of that visit.

"Why the fact is," replied Mr. Toots, "that it's the young woman I come from. Not Miss Dombey — Susan you know."

The Captain nodded his head once, with a grave expression of face, indicative of his regarding that young woman with serious respect.

"And I'll tell you how it happens," said Mr. Toots. "You know, I go and call sometimes, on Miss Dombey. I don't go there on purpose, you know, but I happen to be in the neighbourhood very often; and when I find myself there, why — why I call."

"Nat'rally," observed the Captain.

"Yes," said Mr. Toots. "I called this afternoon. Upon my word and honour, I don't think it's possible to form an idea of the angel Miss Dombey was this afternoon."

The Captain answered with a jerk of his head, implying that it might not be easy to some people, but was quite so, to him.

"As I was coming out," said Mr. Toots, "the young woman, in the most unexpected manner, took me into the pantry."

The Captain seemed, for the moment, to object to this proceeding; and leaning back in his chair, looked at Mr. Toots with a distrustful, if not threatening visage.

"Where she brought out," said Mr. Toots, "this newspaper. She told me that she had kept it from Miss Dombey all day, on account of something that was in it, about somebody that she and Dombey used to know; and then she read the passage to me. Very well. Then she said—wait a minute; what was it, she said though!"

Mr. Toots, endeavouring to concentrate his mental powers on this question, unintentionally fixed the Captain's eye, and was so much discomposed by its stern expression, that his difficulty in resuming the thread of his subject was enhanced to a painful extent.

"Oh!" said Mr. Toots after long consideration. "Oh ah! Yes! She said that she hoped there was a bare possibility that it mightn't be true; and that as she couldn't very well come out herself, without surprising Miss Dombey, would I go down to Mr. Solomon Gills the Instrument Maker's in this street, who was the party's uncle, and ask whether he believed it was true, or had heard anything else in the city. She said, if he couldn't speak to me, no doubt Captain Cuttle could. By the bye!" said Mr. Toots, as the discovery flashed upon him, "you, you know!"

The Captain glanced at the newspaper in Mr. Toots's hand, and breathed short and hurriedly.

"Well," pursued Mr. Toots, "the reason why I'm rather late is, because I went up as far as Finchley first, to get some uncommonly fine chickweed that grows there, for Miss Dombey's bird. But I came on here, directly afterwards. You've seen the paper, I suppose?"

The Captain, who had become cautious of reading the news, lest he should find himself advertised at full length by Mrs. Mac Stinger, shook his head.

"Shall I read the passage to you?" inquired Mr. Toots.

The Captain making a sign in the affirmative, Mr. Toots read as follows, from the Shipping Intelligence:

"Southampton. The barque *Defiance*, Henry James, Commander, arrived in this port to-day, with a cargo of sugar, coffee, and rum, reports that being becalmed on the sixth day of her passage home from Jamaica, in'— in such and such a latitude, you know," said Mr. Toots, after making a feeble dash at the figures, and tumbling over them.

"Aye!" cried the Captain, striking his clenched hand on the table. "Heave a head, my lad!"

"—latitude," repeated Mr. Toots, with a startled glance at the Captain, "and longitude so-and-so, — 'the look-out observed, half an hour before sunset, some fragments of a wreck, drifting at about the distance of a mile. The weather being clear, and the barque making no way, a boat was hoisted out, with orders to inspect the same, when they were found to consist of sundry large spars, and a part of the main rigging of an English brig, of about five hundred tons burden, together with a portion of the stern on which the words and letters 'Son and H—' were yet plainly legible. No vestige of any dead body was to be seen upon the floating fragments. Log of the *Defiance* states, that a breeze springing up in the night, the wreck was seen no more.

There can be no doubt that all surmises as to the fate of the missing vessel, the *Son and Heir*, port of London, bound for Barbados, are now set at rest for ever; that she broke up in the last hurricane; and that every soul on board perished."

Captain Cuttle, like all mankind, little knew how much hope had survived within him under discouragement, until he felt its death-shock. During the reading of the paragraph, and for a minute or two afterwards, he sat with his gaze fixed on the modest Mr. Toots, like a man entranced; then, suddenly rising, and putting on his glazed hat, which, in his visitor's honour, he had laid upon the table, the Captain turned his back, and bent his head down on the little chimney-piece.

"Oh, upon my word and honour," cried Mr. Toots, whose tender heart was moved by the Captain's unexpected distress, "this is a most wretched sort of affair this world is! Somebody's always dying, or going and doing something uncomfortable in it. I'm sure I never should have looked forward so much, to coming into my property, if I had known this. I never saw such a world. It's a great deal worse than Blimber's."

Captain Cuttle, without altering his position, signed to Mr. Toots not to mind him; and presently turned round, with his glazed hat thrust back upon his ears, and his hand composing and smoothing his brown face.

"Wal'r my dear lad," said the Captain, "farewell! Wal'r my child, my boy, and man, I loved you! He warn't my flesh and blood," said the Captain, looking at the fire — "I an't got none — but something of what a father feels when he loses a son, I feel in losing Wal'r. For why?" said the Captain, "Because it an't one loss, but a round dozen. Where's that there young schoolboy with the rosy face and curly hair, that used to be as merry in this here parlour, come round every week, as a piece of music? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there fresh lad, that nothing couldn't tire nor put out, and that sparkled up and

blushed so, when we joked him about Heart's Delight, that he was beautiful to look at? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there man's spirit, all afire, that wouldn't see the old man hove down for a minute, and cared nothing for itself? Gone down with Wal'r. It an't one Wal'r. There was a dozen Wal'rs that I know'd and loved, all holding round his neck when he went down, and they're a-holding round mine now!"

Mr. Toots sat silent: folding and refolding the newspaper as small as possible upon his knee.

"And Sol Gills," said the Captain, gazing at the fire, "poor nevyless old Sol, where are *you* got to! you was left in charge of me; his last words was, 'Take care of my uncle;' What came over *you*, Sol, when you went and gave the go-bye to Ned Cuttle; and what am I to put in my accounts that he's a looking down upon, respecting you! Sol Gills, Sol Gills!" said the Captain, shaking his head slowly, "catch sight of that there newspaper, away from home, with no one as know'd Wal'r by, to say a word; and broadside to you broach, and down you pitch, head-foremost!"

Drawing a heavy sigh, the Captain turned to Mr. Toots, and roused himself to a sustained consciousness of that gentleman's presence.

"My lad," said the Captain, "you must tell the young woman honestly that this here fatal news is too correct. They don't romance, you see, on such pints. It's entered on the ship's log, and that's the truest book as a man can write. Tomorrow morning," said the Captain, "I'll step out and make inquiries; but they'll lead to no good. They can't do it. If you'll give me a look-in in the forenoon, you shall know what I have heerd; but tell the young woman from Cap'en Cuttle, that it's over. Over!" And the Captain, hooking off his glazed hat, pulled his handkerchief out of the crown, wiped his grizzled head

despairingly, and tossed the handkerchief in again, with the indifference of deep dejection.

"Oh! I assure you," said Mr. Toots, "really I am dreadfully sorry. Upon my word I am, though I wasn't acquainted with the party. Do you think Miss Dombey will be very much affected, Captain Gills — I mean, Mr. Cuttle?"

"Why, Lord love you," returned the Captain, with something of compassion for Mr. Toots's innocence. "When she warn't no higher than that, they were as fond of one another as two young doves."

"Were they though!" said Mr. Toots, with a considerably lengthened face.

"They were made for one another," said the Captain mournfully; "but what signifies that now!"

"Upon my word and honour," cried Mr. Toots, blurting out his words through a singular combination of awkward chuckles and emotion, "I'm even more sorry than I was before. You know Captain Gills, I — I positively adore Miss Dombey; — I — I am perfectly sore with loving her;" the burst with which this confession forced itself out of the unhappy Mr. Toots, bespoke the vehemence of his feelings; "but what would be the good of my regarding her in this manner, if I wasn't truly sorry for her feeling pain, whatever was the cause of it. Mine an't a selfish affection, you know," said Mr. Toots, in the confidence engendered by his having been a witness of the Captain's tenderness. "It's the sort of thing with me, Captain Gills, that if I could be run over — or — or trampled upon — or — or thrown off a very high place — or any thing of that sort — for Miss Dombey's sake, it would be the most delightful thing that could happen to me."

All this, Mr. Toots said in a suppressed voice, to prevent its reaching the jealous ears of the Chicken, who objected to the softer emotions; which effort of restraint, coupled with the

intensity of his feelings, made him red to the tips of his ears, and caused him to present such an affecting spectacle of disinterested love to the eyes of Captain Cuttle, that the good Captain patted him consolingly on the back, and bade him cheer up.

“Thankee Captain Gills,” said Mr. Toots, “it ’s kind of you, in the midst of your own troubles, to say so. I’m very much obliged to you. As I said before, I really want a friend, and should be glad to have your acquaintance. Although I am very well off,” said Mr. Toots with energy, “you can’t think what a miserable Beast I am. The hollow crowd, you know, when they see me with the Chicken, and characters of distinction like that, suppose me to be happy; but I’m wretched. I suffer for Miss Dombey, Captain Gills. I can’t get through my meals; I have no pleasure in my tailor; I often cry when I’m alone. I assure you it ’ll be a satisfaction to me to come back to-morrow, or to come back fifty times.”

Mr. Toots, with these words, shook the Captain’s hand; and disguising such traces of his agitation as could be disguised on so short a notice, before the Chicken’s penetrating glance, rejoined that eminent gentleman in the shop. The Chicken, who was apt to be jealous of his ascendancy, eyed Captain Cuttle with anything but favour as he took leave of Mr. Toots, but followed his patron without being otherwise demonstrative of his ill-will: leaving the Captain oppressed with sorrow; and Rob the Grinder elevated with joy, on account of having had the honour of staring for nearly half an hour, at the conqueror of the Nobby Shropshire One.

Long after Rob was fast asleep in his bed under the counter, the Captain sat looking at the fire; and long after there was no fire to look at, the Captain sat gazing on the rusty bars, with unavailing thoughts of Walter and old Sol crowding through his mind. Retirement to the stormy chamber at the top of the house

brought no rest with it; and the Captain rose up in the morning, sorrowful and unrefreshed.

As soon as the city offices were opened, the Captain issued forth to the counting-house of Dombey and Son. But there was no opening of the Midshipman's windows that morning. Rob the Grinder, by the Captains orders, left the shutters closed, and the house was as a house of death.

It chanced that Mr. Carker was entering the office, as Captain Cuttle arrived at the door. Receiving the Manager's benison gravely and silently, Captain Cuttle made bold to accompany him into his own room.

"Well, Captain Cuttle," said Mr. Carker, taking up his usual position before the fire-place, and keeping on his hat, "this is a bad business."

"You have received the news as was in print yesterday, Sir?" said the Captain.

"Yes," said Mr. Carker, "we have received it! It was accurately stated. The under-writers suffer a considerable loss. We are very sorry. No help! Such is life!"

Mr. Carker pared his nails delicately with a penknife, and smiled at the Captain, who was standing by the door looking at him.

"I excessively regret poor Gay," said Carker, "and the crew. I understand there were some of our very best men among 'em. It always happens so. Many men with families too. A comfort to reflect that poor Gay had no family, Captain Cuttle!"

The Captain stood rubbing his chin, and looking at the Manager. The Manager glanced at the unopened letters lying on his desk, and took up the newspaper.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Captain Cuttle?" he asked, looking off it, with a smiling and expressive glance at the door.

"I wish you could set my mind at rest, Sir, on something it's uneasy about," returned the Captain.

"Aye!" exclaimed the Manager, "what 's that? Come, Captain Cuttle, I must trouble you to be quick, if you please. I am much engaged."

"Looke 'e here, Sir," said the Captain, advancing a step. "Afore my friend Wal'r went on this here disastrous voyage —"

"Come, come, Captain Cuttle," interposed the smiling Manager, "don't talk about disastrous voyages in that way. We have nothing to do with disastrous voyages here, my good fellow. You must have begun very early on your day's allowance, Captain, if you don't remember that there are hazards in all voyages, whether by sea or land. You are not made uneasy by the supposition that young what 's-his-name was lost in bad weather that was got up against him in these offices — are you? Fie, Captain! Sleep, and soda-water, are the best cures for such uneasiness as that."

"My lad," returned the Captain, slowly — "you are a'most a lad to me, and so I don't ask your pardon for that slip of a word, — if you find any pleasure in this here sport, you an't the gentleman I took you for. And if you an't the gentleman I took you for, may be my mind has call to be uneasy. Now this is what it is, Mr. Carker. — Afore that poor lad went away, according to orders, he told me that he warn't a going away for his own good, or for promotion, he know'd. It was my belief that he was wrong, and I told him so, and I come here, your head governor being absent, to ask a question or two of you in a civil way, for my own satisfaction. Them questions you answered — free. Now it 'ill ease my mind to know, when all is over, as it is, and when what can't be cured must be endoored — for which, as a scholar, you 'll overhaul the book it 's in, and thereof make a note — to know once more, in a word, that I warn't mistaken; that I warn't back'ard in my duty when I didn't tell the old man

what Wal'r told me; and that the wind was truly in his sail, when he highsted of it for Barbadoes Harbour. Mr. Carker," said the Captain, in the goodness of his nature, "when I was here last, we was very pleasant together. If I ain't been altogether so pleasant myself this morning, on account of this poor lad, and if I have chafed again any observation of yours that I might have fended off, my name is Ed'ard Cuttle, and I ask your pardon."

"Captain Cuttle," returned the Manager, with all possible politeness, "I must ask you to do me a favour."

"And what is it, Sir?" inquired the Captain.

"To have the goodness to walk off, if you please," rejoined the Manager, stretching forth his arm, "and to carry your jargon somewhere else."

Every knob in the Captain's face turned white with astonishment and indignation; even the red rim on his forehead faded, like a rainbow among the gathering clouds.

"I tell you what, Captain Cuttle," said the Manager, shaking his forefinger at him, and showing him all his teeth, but still amiably smiling, "I was much too lenient with you when you came here before. You belong to an artful and audacious set of people. In my desire to save young what's-his-name from being kicked out of this place, neck and crop, my good Captain, I tolerated you; but for once, and only once. Now, go, my friend!"

The Captain was absolutely rooted to the ground, and speechless.

"Go," said the good-humoured Manager, gathering up his skirts, and standing astride upon the hearth-rug, "like a sensible fellow, and let us have no turning out, or any such violent measures. If Mr. Dombey were here, Captain, you might be obliged to leave in a more ignominious manner, possibly. I merely say, Go!"

The Captain, laying his ponderous hand upon his chest, to assist himself in fetching a deep breath, looked at Mr. Carker from head to foot, and looked round the little room, as if he did not clearly understand where he was, or in what company.

“You are deep, Captain Cuttle,” pursued Carker, with the easy and vivacious frankness of a man of the world who knew the world too well to be ruffled by any discovery of misdoing, when it did not immediately concern himself; “but you are not quite out of soundings, either — neither you nor your absent friend, Captain. What have you done with your absent friend, hey?”

Again the Captain laid his hand upon his chest. After drawing another deep breath, he conjured himself to “stand by!” But in a whisper.

“You hatch nice little plots, and hold nice little councils, and make nice little appointments, and receive nice little visitors too, Captain, hey?” said Carker, bending his brows upon him, without showing his teeth any the less; “but it’s a bold measure to come here afterwards. Not like your discretion! You conspirators, and hidiers, and runners-away, should know better than that. Will you oblige me by going?”

“My lad,” gasped the Captain, in a choked and trembling voice, and with a curious action going on in the ponderous fist; “there’s a many words I could wish to say to you, but I don’t rightly know where they’re stowed just at present. My young friend, Wal’r, was drowned only last night, according to my reckoning, and it puts me out, you see. But you and me will come alongside o’ one another again, my lad,” said the Captain, holding up his hook, “if we live.”

“It will be anything but shrewd in you, my good fellow, if we do,” returned the Manager, with the same frankness; “for you may rely, I give you fair warning, upon my detecting and exposing you. I don’t pretend to be a more moral man than my

neighbours, my good Captain; but the confidence of this house, or of any member of this house, is not to be abused and undermined while I have eyes and ears. Good day!" said Mr. Carker, nodding his head.

Captain Cuttle, looking at him steadily (Mr. Carker looked full as steadily at the Captain), went out of the office and left him standing astride before the fire, as calm and pleasant as if there were no more spots upon his soul than on his pure white linen, and his smooth sleek skin.

The Captain glanced, in passing through the outer counting-house, at the desk where he knew poor Walter had been used to sit, now occupied by another young boy, with a face almost as fresh and hopeful as his on the day when they tapped the famous last bottle but one of the old Madeira, in the little back parlour. The association of ideas, thus awakened, did the Captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger, and brought the tears into his eyes.

Arrived at the Wooden Midshipman's again, and sitting down in a corner of the dark shop, the Captain's indignation, strong as it was, could make no head against his grief. Passion seemed not only to do wrong and violence to the memory of the dead, but to be infected by death, and to droop and decline beside it. All the living knaves and liars in the world, were nothing to the honesty and truth of one dead friend.

The only thing the honest Captain made out clearly, in this state of mind, besides the loss of Walter, was, that with him almost the whole world of Captain Cuttle had been drowned. If he reproached himself sometimes, and keenly too, for having ever connived at Walter's innocent deceit, he thought at least as often of the Mr. Carker whom no sea could ever render up; and the Mr. Dombey, whom he now began to perceive was as far beyond human recall; and the "Heart's Delight," with whom he must never foregather again; and the lovely Peg, that teak-built

and trim ballad, that had gone ashore upon a rock, and split into mere planks and beams of rhyme. The Captain sat in the dark shop, thinking of these things, to the entire exclusion of his own injury; and looking with as sad an eye upon the ground, as if in contemplation of their actual fragments, as they floated past him.

But the Captain was not unmindful, for all that, of such decent and respectful observances in memory of poor Walter, as he felt within his power. Rousing himself, and rousing Rob the Grinder (who in the unnatural twilight was fast asleep), the Captain sallied forth with his attendant at his heels, and the door-key in his pocket, and repairing to one of those convenient slop-selling establishments of which there is abundant choice at the eastern end of London, purchased on the spot two suits of mourning — one for Rob the Grinder, which was immensely too small, and one for himself, which was immensely too large. He also provided Rob with a species of hat, greatly to be admired for its symmetry and usefulness, as well as for a happy blending of the mariner with the coal-heaver; which is usually termed a sou'wester; and which was something of a novelty in connexion with the instrument business. In their several garments, which the vendor declared to be such a miracle in point of fit as nothing but a rare combination of fortuitous circumstances ever brought about, and the fashion of which was unparalleled within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, the Captain and Grinder immediately arrayed themselves: presenting a spectacle fraught with wonder to all who beheld it.

In this altered form, the Captain received Mr. Toots. "I'm took aback, my lad, at present," said the Captain, "and will only confirm that there ill news. Tell the young woman to break it gentle to the young lady, and for neither of 'em never to think of me no more — 'special, mind you, that is — though I will think of them, when night comes on a hurricane and seas is

mountains rowling, for which overhaul your Doctor Watts, brother, and when found make a note on."

The Captain reserved, until some fitter time, the consideration of Mr. Toots's offer of friendship, and thus dismissed him. Captain Cuttle's spirits were so low, in truth, that he half determined, that day, to take no further precautions against surprise from Mrs. Mac Stinger, but to abandon himself recklessly to chance, and be indifferent to what might happen. As evening came on, he fell into a better frame of mind, however; and spoke much of Walter to Rob the Grinder, whose attention and fidelity he likewise incidentally commended. Rob did not blush to hear the Captain earnest in his praises, but sat staring at him, and affecting to snivel with sympathy, and making a feint of being virtuous, and treasuring up every word he said (like a young spy as he was) with very promising deceit.

When Rob had turned in, and was fast asleep, the Captain trimmed the candle, put on his spectacles — he had felt it appropriate to take to spectacles on entering into the Instrument Trade, though his eyes were like a hawk's — and opened the prayer-book at the Burial Service. And reading softly to himself, in the little back parlour, and stopping now and then to wipe his eyes, the Captain, in a true and simple spirit, committed Walter's body to the deep.

CHAPTER XIII.

Contrasts.

TURN we our eyes upon two homes; not lying side by side, but wide apart, though both within easy range and reach of the great city of London.

The first, is situated in the green and wooded country near Norwood. It is not a mansion; it is of no pretensions as to size; but it is beautifully arranged, and tastefully kept. The lawn, the soft, smooth slope, the flower-garden, the clumps of trees

where graceful forms of ash and willow are not wanting, the conservatory, the rustic verandah with sweet-smelling creeping plants entwined about the pillars, the simple exterior of the house, the well-ordered offices, though all upon the diminutive scale proper to a mere cottage, bespeak an amount of elegant comfort within, that might serve for a palace. This indication is not without warrant; for, within, it is a house of refinement and luxury. Rich colours, excellently blended, meet the eye at every turn; in the furniture—its proportions admirably devised to suit the shapes and sizes of the small rooms; on the walls; upon the floors; tinging and subduing the light that comes in through the odd glass doors and windows here and there. There are a few choice prints and pictures, too; in quaint nooks and recesses there is no want of books; and there are games of skill and chance set forth on tables — fantastic chessmen, dice, backgammon, cards, and billiards.

And yet, amidst this opulence of comfort, there is something in the general air that is not well. Is it that the carpets and the cushions are too soft and noiseless, so that those who move or repose among them seem to act by stealth? Is it that the prints and pictures do not commemorate great thoughts or deeds, or render nature in the poetry of landscape, hall, or hut, but are of one voluptuous cast — mere shows of form and colour — and no more? Is it that the books have all their gold outside, and that the titles of the greater part qualify them to be companions of the prints and pictures? Is it that the completeness and the beauty of the place is here and there belied by an affectation of humility, in some unimportant and inexpensive regard, which is as false as the face of the too truly painted portrait hanging yonder, or its original at breakfast in his easy chair below it? Or is it that, with the daily breath of that original and master of all here, there issues forth some subtle portion of himself, which gives a vague expression of himself to everything about him!

It is Mr. Carker the Manager who sits in the easy chair. A gaudy parrot in a burnished cage upon the table tears at the wires with her beak, and goes walking, upside down, in its dome-top, shaking her house, and screeching; but Mr. Carker is indifferent to the bird, and looks with a musing smile at a picture on the opposite wall.

"A most extraordinary accidental likeness, certainly," says he.

Perhaps it is a Juno; perhaps a Potiphar's Wife; perhaps some scornful Nymph — according as the Picture Dealers found the market, when they christened it. It is the figure of a woman, supremely handsome, who, turning away, but with her face addressed to the spectator, flashes her proud glance upon him.

It is like Edith.

With a passing gesture of his hand at the picture — what! a menace? No; yet something like it. A wave as if triumph? No, yet more like that. An insolent salute wafted from his lips? No; yet like that too — he resumes his breakfast, and calls to the chafing and imprisoned bird, who, coming down into a pendant gilded hoop within the cage, like a great wedding-ring, swings in it, for his delight.

The second home is on the other side of London, near to where the busy great north road of bygone days is silent and almost deserted, except by wayfarers who toil along on foot. It is a poor, small house, barely and sparsely furnished, but very clean; and there is even an attempt to decorate it, shown in the homely flowers trained about the porch and in the narrow garden. The neighbourhood in which it stands has as little of the country to recommend it, as it has of the town. It is neither of the town nor country. The former, like the giant in his travelling boots, has made a stride and passed it, and has set his brick-and-mortar heel a long way in advance; but the intermediate space between the giant's feet, as yet, is only blighted country, and

not town; and here, among a few tall chimneys belching smoke all day and night, and among the brick-fields, and the lanes where turf is cut, and where the fences tumble down, and where the dusty nettles grow, and where a scrap or two of hedge may yet be seen, and where the bird-catcher still comes occasionally, though he swears every time to come no more — this second home is to be found.

She who inhabits it, is she who left the first in her devotion to an out-cast brother. She withdrew from that home its redeeming spirit, and from its master's breast his solitary angel: but though his liking for her is gone, after this ungrateful slight as he considers it; and though he abandons her altogether in return, an old idea of her is not quite forgotten even by him. Let her flower-garden, in which he never sets his foot, but which is yet maintained, among all his costly alterations, as if she had quitted it but yesterday, bear witness!

Harriet Carker has changed since then, and on her beauty there has fallen a heavier shade than Time of his unassisted self can cast, all-potent as he is — the shadow of anxiety and sorrow, and the daily struggle of a poor existence. But it is beauty still; and still a gentle, quiet, and retiring beauty that must be sought out, for it cannot vaunt itself; if it could, it would be what it is, no more.

Yes. This slight, small, patient figure, neatly dressed in homely stuffs, and indicating nothing but the dull, household virtues, that have so little in common with the received idea of heroism and greatness, unless, indeed, any ray of them should shine through the lives of the great ones of the earth, when it becomes a constellation and is tracked in Heaven straightway — this slight, small, patient figure, leaning on the man still young but worn and grey, is she his sister, who, of all the world, went over to him in his shame and put her hand in his, and with a

sweet composure and determination, led him hopefully upon his barren way.

"It is early, John," she said. "Why do you go so early?"

"Not many minutes earlier than usual, Harriet. If I have the time to spare, I should like, I think — it's a fancy — to walk once by the house where I took leave of him."

"I wish I had ever seen or known him, John."

"It is better as it is, my dear, remembering his fate."

"But I could not regret it more, though I had known him. Is not your sorrow mine? And if I had, perhaps you would feel that I was a better companion to you in speaking about him, than I may seem now."

"My dearest sister! Is there anything within the range of rejoicing or regret, in which I am not sure of your companionship?"

"I hope you think not, John, for surely there is nothing!"

"How could you be better to me, or nearer to me than, than you are in this, or anything?" said her brother. "I feel that you did know him, Harriet, and that you shared my feelings towards him."

She drew the hand which had been resting on his shoulder, round his neck, and answered, with some hesitation:

"No, not quite."

"True, true!" he said; "you think I might have done him no harm if I had allowed myself to know him better?"

"Think! I know it."

"Designedly, Heaven knows I would not," he replied, shaking his head mournfully; "but his reputation was too precious to be perilled by such association. Whether you share that knowledge, or do not, my dear —"

"I do not," she said, quietly.

"It is still the truth, Harriet, and my mind is lighter when I think of him for that which made it so much heavier then." He

checked himself in his tone of melancholy, and smiled upon her as he said "Good by'e!"

"Good by'e, dear John! In the evening, at the old time and place, I shall meet you as usual on your way home. Good by'e."

The cordial face she lifted up to his to kiss him, was his home, his life, his universe, and yet it was a portion of his punishment and grief; for in the cloud he saw upon it — though serene and calm as any radiant cloud at sunset — and in the constancy and devotion of her life, and in the sacrifice she had made of ease, enjoyment, and hope, he saw the bitter fruits of his old crime, for ever ripe and fresh.

She stood at the door looking after him, with her hands loosely clasped in each other, as he made his way over the frowzy and uneven patch of ground which lay before their house, which had once (and not long ago) been a pleasant meadow, and was now a very waste, with a disorderly crop of beginnings of mean houses, rising out of the rubbish, as if they had been unskillfully sown there. Whenever he looked back — as once or twice he did — her cordial face shone like a light upon his heart; but when he plodded on his way, and saw her not, the tears were in her eyes as she stood watching him.

Her pensive form was not long idle at the door. There was daily duty to discharge, and daily work to do — for such commonplace spirits that are not heroic, often work hard with their hands — and Harriet was soon busy with her household tasks. These discharged, and the poor house made quite neat and orderly, she counted her little stock of money, with an anxious face, and went out thoughtfully to buy some necessaries for their table, planning and contriving, as she went, how to save. So sordid are the lives of such low natures, who are not only not heroic to their valets and waiting-women, but have neither valets nor waiting-women to be heroic to withal!

While she was absent, and there was no one in the house,

there approached it by a different way from that the brother had taken, a gentleman, a very little past his prime of life perhaps, but of a healthy florid hue, an upright presence, and a bright clear aspect, that was gracious and good-humoured. His eyebrows were still black, and so was much of his hair; the sprinkling of grey observable among the latter, graced the former very much, and showed his broad frank brow and honest eyes to great advantage.

After knocking once at the door, and obtaining no response, this gentleman sat down on a bench in the little porch to wait. A certain skilful action of his fingers as he hummed some bars, and beat time on the seat beside him, seemed to denote the musician; and the extraordinary satisfaction he derived from humming something very slow and long, which had no recognisable tune, seemed to denote that he was a scientific one.

The gentleman was still twirling a theme, which seemed to go round and round and round, and in and in and in, and to involve itself like a corkscrew twirled upon a table, without getting any nearer to anything, when Harriet appeared returning. He rose up as she advanced, and stood with his head uncovered.

“You are come again, Sir!” she said, faltering.

“I take that liberty,” he answered. “May I ask for five minutes of your leisure?”

After a moment's hesitation, she opened the door, and gave him admission to the little parlour. The gentleman sat down there, drew his chair to the table over against her, and said, in a voice that perfectly corresponded to his appearance, and with a simplicity that was very engaging:

“Miss Harriet, you cannot be proud. You signified to me, when I called t' other morning, that you were. Pardon me if I say that I looked into your face while you spoke, and that it contradicted you. I look into it again,” he added, laying his hand

gently on her arm, for an instant, "and it contradicts you more and more."

She was somewhat confused and agitated, and could make no ready answer.

"It is the mirror of truth," said her visitor, "and gentleness. Excuse my trusting to it, and returning."

His manner of saying these words, divested them entirely of the character of compliments. It was so plain, grave, unaffected, and sincere that she bent her head, as if at once to thank him, and acknowledge his sincerity.

"The disparity between our ages," said the gentleman, "and the plainness of my purpose, empower me, I am glad to think, to speak my mind. That is my mind; and so you see me for the second time."

"There is a kind of pride, Sir," she returned, after a moment's silence, "or what may be supposed to be pride, which is mere duty. I hope I cherish no other."

"For yourself," he said.

"For myself."

"But — pardon me —" suggested the gentleman. "For your brother John?"

"Proud of his love, I am," said Harriet, looking full upon her visitor, and changing her manner on the instant — not that it was less composed and quiet, but that there was a deep impassioned earnestness in it that made the very tremble in her voice a part of her firmness, "and proud of him. Sir, you who strangely know the story of his life, and repeated it to me when you were here last —"

"Merely to make my way into your confidence," interposed the gentleman. "For Heaven's sake, don't suppose —"

"I am sure," she said, "you revived it, in my hearing, with a kind and good purpose. I am quite sure of it."

"I thank you," returned her visitor, pressing her hand

hastily. "I am much obliged to you. You do me justice, I assure you. You were going to say, that I, who know the story of John Carker's life —"

"May think it pride in me," she continued, "when I say that I am proud of him. *I am*. You know the time was, when I was not — when I could not be — but that is past. The humility of many years, the uncomplaining expiation, the true repentance, the terrible regret, the pain I know he has even in my affection, which he thinks has cost me dear, though Heaven knows I am happy, but for his sorrow! — oh Sir, after what I have seen, let me conjure you, if you are in any place of power, and are ever wronged, never, for any wrong, inflict a punishment that cannot be recalled; while there is a God above us to work changes in the hearts He made."

"Your brother is an altered man," returned the gentleman, compassionately. "I assure you I don't doubt it."

"He was an altered man when he did wrong," said Harriet. "He is an altered man again, and is his true self now, believe me, Sir."

"But we go on," said her visitor, rubbing his forehead, in an absent manner, with his hand, and then drumming thoughtfully on the table, "we go on in our clock-work routine, from day to day, and can't make out, or follow, these changes. They — they're a metaphysical sort of thing. We — we haven't leisure for it. We — we haven't courage. They're not taught at schools or colleges, and we don't know how to set about it. In short, we are so d—d business-like," said the gentleman, walking to the window, and back, and sitting down again, in a state of extreme dissatisfaction and vexation.

"I am sure," said the gentleman, rubbing his forehead again; and drumming on the table as before, "I have good reason to believe that a jog-trot life, the same from day to day, would reconcile one to anything. One don't see anything, one don't hear

anything, one don't know anything; that's the fact. We go on taking everything for granted, and so we go on, until whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit. Habit is all I shall have to report, when I am called upon to plead to my conscience, on my death-bed. 'Habit,' says I; 'I was deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic, to a million things, from habit.' 'Very business-like indeed, Mr. What's-your name,' says Conscience, 'but it won't do here!'

The gentleman got up and walked to the window again, and back: seriously uneasy, though giving his uneasiness this peculiar expression.

"Miss Harriet," he said, resuming his chair, "I wish you would let me serve you. Look at me! I ought to look honest, for I know I am so, at present. Do I?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile.

"I believe every word you have said," he returned. "I am full of self-reproach that I might have known this and seen this, and known you and seen you, any time these dozen years, and that I never have. I hardly know how I ever got here — creature that I am, not only of my own habit, but of other people's! But having done so, let me do something. I ask it in all honour and respect. You inspire me with both, in the highest degree. Let me do something."

"We are contented, Sir."

"No, no, not quite," returned the gentleman. "I think not quite. There are some little comforts that might smooth your life, and his. And his!" he repeated, fancying that had made some impression on her. "I have been in the habit of thinking that there was nothing wanting to be done for him; that it was all settled and over; in short, of not thinking at all about it. I am different now. Let me do something for him. You too," said the visitor, with careful delicacy, "have need to watch your health closely, for his sake, and I fear it fails."

"Whoever you may be, Sir," answered Harriet, raising her eyes to his face, "I am deeply grateful to you. I feel certain that in all you say, you have no object in the world but kindness to us. But years have passed since we began this life; and to take from my brother any part of what has so endeared him to me, and so proved his better resolution — any fragment of the merit of his unassisted, obscure, and forgotten reparation — would be to diminish the comfort it will be to him and me, when that time comes to each of us, of which you spoke just now. I thank you better with these tears than any words. Believe it, pray."

The gentleman was moved, and put the hand she held out, to his lips, much as a tender father might kiss the hand of a dutiful child. But more reverently.

"If the day should ever come," said Harriet, "when he is restored, in part, to the position he lost —"

"Restored!" cried the gentleman, quickly. "How can that be hoped for? In whose hands does the power of any restoration lie? It is no mistake of mine, surely, to suppose that his having gained the priceless blessing of his life, is one cause of the animosity shown to him by his brother."

"You touch upon a subject that is never breathed between us; not even between us," said Harriet.

"I beg your forgiveness," said the visitor. "I should have known it. I entreat you to forget that I have done so, inadvertently. And now, as I dare urge no more — as I am not sure that I have a right to do so — though Heaven knows, even that doubt may be habit," said the gentleman, rubbing his head, as despondently as before, "let me; though a stranger, yet no stranger; ask two favours."

"What are they?" she inquired.

"The first, that if you should see cause to change your resolution, you will suffer me to be as your right hand. My name

shall then be at your service; it is useless now, and always insignificant."

"Our choice of friends," she answered, smiling faintly, "is not so great, that I need any time for consideration. I can promise that."

"The second, that you will allow me sometimes, say every Monday morning, at nine o'clock — habit again — I must be business-like," said the gentleman, with a whimsical inclination to quarrel with himself on that head, "in walking past, to see you at the door or window. I don't ask to come in, as your brother will be gone out at that hour. I don't ask to speak to you. I merely ask to see, for the satisfaction of my own mind, that you are well, and without intrusion to remind you, by the sight of me, that you have a friend — an elderly friend, grey-haired already, and fast growing greyer — whom you may ever command."

The cordial face looked up in his; confided in it; and promised.

"I understand, as before," said the gentleman, rising, "that you purpose not to mention my visit to John Carker, lest he should be at all distressed by my acquaintance with his history. I am glad of it, for it is out of the ordinary course of things, and — habit again!" said the gentleman, checking himself impatiently, "as if there were no better course than the ordinary course!"

With that he turned to go, and walking, bare-headed, to the outside of the little porch, took leave of her with such a happy mixture of unconstrained respect and unaffected interest, as no breeding could have taught, no truth mistrusted, and nothing but a pure and single heart expressed.

Many half-forgotten emotions were awakened in the sister's mind by this visit. It was so very long since any other visitor had crossed their threshold; it was so very long since any voice of

sympathy had made sad music in her ears; that the stranger's figure remained present to her, hours afterwards, when she sat at the window, plying her needle; and his words seemed newly spoken, again and again. He had touched the spring that opened her whole life; and if she lost him for a short space, it was only among the many shapes of the one great recollection of which that life was made.

Musing and working by turns; now constraining herself to be steady at her needle for a long time together, and now letting her work fall, unregarded, on her lap, and straying wheresoever her busier thoughts led, Harriet Carker found the hours glide by her, and the day steal on. The morning, which had been bright and clear, gradually became overcast; a sharp wind set in; the rain fell heavily; and a dark mist drooping over the distant town, hid it from the view.

She often looked with compassion, at such a time, upon the stragglers who came wandering into London, by the great highway hard-by, and who, foot-sore and weary, and gazing fearfully at the huge town before them, as if foreboding that their misery there would be but as a drop of water in the sea, or as a grain of sea-sand on the shore, went shrinking on, cowering before the angry weather, and looking as if the very elements rejected them. Day after day, such travellers crept past, but always, as she thought, in one direction — always towards the town. Swallowed up in one phase or other of its immensity, towards which they seemed impelled by a desperate fascination, they never returned. Food for the hospitals, the churchyards, the prisons, the river, fever, madness, vice, and death, — they passed on to the monster, roaring in the distance, and were lost.

The chill wind was howling, and the rain was falling, and the day was darkening moodily, when Harriet, raising her eyes from the work on which she had long since been engaged with

unremitting constancy, saw one of these travellers approaching.

A woman. A solitary woman of some thirty years of age; tall; well-formed; handsome; miserably dressed; the soil of many country roads in varied weather — dust, chalk, clay, gravel — clotted on her grey cloak by the streaming wet; no bonnet on her head, nothing to defend her rich black hair from the rain, but a torn handkerchief; with the fluttering ends of which, and with her hair, the wind blinded her, so that she often stopped to push them back, and look upon the way she was going.

She was in the act of doing so, when Harriet observed her. As her hands, parting on her sun-burnt forehead, swept across her face, and threw aside the hindrances that encroached upon it, there was a reckless and regardless beauty in it: a dauntless and depraved indifference to more than weather: a carelessness of what was cast upon her bare head from Heaven or earth: that, coupled with her misery and loneliness, touched the heart of her fellow woman. She thought of all that was perverted and debased within her, no less than without: of modest graces of the mind, hardened and steeled, like these attractions of the person; of the many gifts of the Creator flung to the winds like the wild hair; of all the beautiful ruin upon which the storm was beating and the night was coming.

Thinking of this, she did not turn away with a delicate indignation — too many of her own compassionate and tender sex too often do — but pitied her.

Her fallen sister came on, looking far before her, trying with her eager eyes to pierce the mist in which the city was enshrouded, and glancing, now and then, from side to side, with the bewildered and uncertain aspect of a stranger. Though her tread was bold and courageous, she was fatigued, and after a moment of irresolution, sat down upon a heap of stones; seek-

ing no shelter from the rain, but letting it rain on her as it would.

She was now opposite the house; raising her head after resting it for a moment on both hands, her eyes met those of Harriet.

In a moment, Harriet was at the door; and the other, rising from her seat at her beck, came slowly, and with no conciliatory look, towards her.

“Why do you rest in the rain?” said Harriet, gently.

“Because I have no other resting-place,” was the reply.

“But there are many places of shelter near here. This,” referring to the little porch, “is better than where you were. You are very welcome to rest here.”

The wanderer looked at her, in doubt and surprise, but without any expression of thankfulness; and sitting down, and taking off one of her worn shoes to beat out the fragments of stone and dust that were inside, showed that her foot was cut and bleeding.

Harriet uttering an expression of pity, the traveller looked up with a contemptuous and incredulous smile.

“Why, what’s a torn foot to such as me?” she said. “And what’s a torn foot in such as me, to such as you?”

“Come in and wash it,” answered Harriet, mildly, “and let me give you something to bind it up.”

The woman caught her arm, and drawing it before her own eyes, hid them against it, and wept. Not like a woman, but like a stern man surprised into that weakness; with a violent heaving of her breast, and struggle for recovery, that showed how unusual the emotion was with her.

She submitted to be led into the house, and, evidently more in gratitude than in any care for herself, washed and bound the injured place. Harriet then put before her the fragments of her own frugal dinner, and when she had eaten of them, though

sparingly, besought her, before resuming her road (which she showed her anxiety to do), to dry her clothes before the fire. Again, more in gratitude than with any evidence of concern in her own behalf, she sat down in front of it, and unbinding the handkerchief about her head, and letting her thick wet hair fall down below her waist, sat drying it with the palms of her hands, and looking at the blaze.

"I dare say you are thinking," she said, lifting her head suddenly, "that I used to be handsome, once. I believe I was — I know I was. Look here!"

She held up her hair roughly with both hands; seizing it as if she would have torn it out; then, threw it down again, and flung it back as though it were a heap of serpents.

"Are you a stranger in this place?" asked Harriet.

"A stranger!" she returned, stopping between each short reply, and looking at the fire, "Yes. Ten or a dozen years a stranger. I have had no almanack where I have been. Ten or a dozen years. I don't know this part. It's much altered since I went away."

"Have you been far?"

"Very far. Months upon months over the sea, and far away even then. I have been where convicts go," she added, looking full upon her entertainer. "I have been one myself."

"Heaven help you and forgive you!" was the gentle answer.

"Ah! Heaven help me and forgive me!" she returned, nodding her head at the fire. "If man would help some of us a little more, God would forgive us all the sooner perhaps."

But she was softened by the earnest manner, and the cordial face so full of mildness and so free from judgment, of her, and said, less hardily:

"We may be about the same age, you and me. If I am older, it is not above a year or two. Oh think of that!"

She opened her arms, as though the exhibition of her out-

ward form would show the moral wretch she was; and letting them drop at her sides, hung down her head.

"There is nothing we may not hope to repair; it is never too late to amend," said Harriet. "You are penitent —"

"No," she answered. "I am not! I can't be. I am no such thing. Why should I be penitent, and all the world go free. They talk to me of my penitence. Who's penitent for the wrongs that have been done to me!"

She rose up, bound her handkerchief about her head, and turned to move away.

"Where are you going?" said Harriet.

"Yonder," she answered, pointing with her hand. "To London."

"Have you any home to go to?"

"I think I have a mother. She's as much a mother, as her dwelling is a home," she answered with a bitter laugh.

"Take this," cried Harriet, putting money in her hand. "Try to do well. It is very little, but for one day it may keep you from harm."

"Are you married?" said the other, faintly, as she took it.

"No. I live here with my brother. We have not much to spare, or I would give you more."

"Will you let me kiss you?"

Seeing no scorn or repugnance in her face, the object of her charity bent over her as she asked the question, and pressed her lips against her cheek. Once more she caught her arm, and covered her eyes with it; and then was gone.

Gone into the deepening night, and howling wind, and pelting rain; urging her way on, towards the mist-enshrouded city where the blurred lights gleamed; and with her black hair, and disordered head-gear, fluttering round her reckless face.

CHAPTER XIV.

Another mother and daughter.

IN an ugly and dark room, an old woman, ugly and dark too, sat listening to the wind and rain, and crouching over a meagre fire. More constant to the last-named occupation than the first, she never changed her attitude, unless, when any stray drops of rain fell hissing on the smouldering embers, to raise her head with an awakened attention to the whistling and pattering outside, and gradually to let it fall again lower and lower and lower as she sunk into a brooding state of thought, in which the noises of the night were as indistinctly regarded as is the monotonous rolling of a sea by one who sits in contemplation on its shore.

There was no light in the room save that which the fire afforded. Glaring sullenly from time to time like the eye of a fierce beast half asleep, it revealed no objects that needed to be jealous of a better display. A heap of rags, a heap of bones, a wretched bed, two or three mutilated chairs or stools, the black walls and blacker ceiling, were all its winking brightness shone upon. As the old woman, with a gigantic and distorted image of herself thrown half upon the wall behind her, half upon the roof above, sat bending over the few loose bricks within which it was pent, on the damp hearth of the chimney — for there was no stove — she looked as if she were watching at some witch's altar for a favourable token; and but that the movement of her chattering jaws and trembling chin was too frequent and too fast for the slow flickering of the fire, it would have seemed an illusion wrought by the light, as it came and went, upon a face as motionless as the form to which it belonged.

If Florence could have stood within the room and looked upon the original of the shadow thrown upon the wall and roof,

as it cowered thus over the fire, a glance might have sufficed to recall the figure of good Mrs. Brown; notwithstanding that her childish recollection of that terrible old woman was as grotesque and exaggerated a presentment of the truth, perhaps, as the shadow on the wall. But Florence was not there to look on; and good Mrs. Brown remained unrecognised, and sat staring at her fire, unobserved.

Attracted by a louder sputtering than usual, as the rain came hissing down the chimney in a little stream, the old woman raised her head, impatiently, to listen afresh. And this time she did not drop it again; for there was a hand upon the door, and a footstep in the room.

“Who’s that?” she said, looking over her shoulder.

“One who brings you news,” was the answer, in a woman’s voice.

“News? Where from?”

“From abroad.”

“From beyond seas?” cried the old woman, starting up.

“Aye, from beyond seas.”

The old woman raked the fire together, hurriedly, and going close to her visitor who had entered, and shut the door, and who now stood in the middle of the room, put her hand upon the drenched cloak, and turned the unresisting figure, so as to have it in the full light of the fire. She did not find what she had expected, whatever that might be; for she let the cloak go again, and uttered a querulous cry of disappointment and misery.

“What is the matter?” asked her visitor.

“Oho! Oho!” cried the old woman, turning her face upward, with a terrible howl.

“What is the matter?” asked the visitor again.

“It’s not my gal!” cried the old woman, tossing up her arms, and clasping her hands above her head. “Where’s my

Alice? Where's my handsome daughter? They've been the death of her!"

"They have not been the death of her yet, if your name's Marwood," said the visitor.

"Have you seen my gal, then?" cried the old woman. "Has she wrote to me?"

"She said you couldn't read," returned the other.

"No more I can!" exclaimed the old woman, wringing her hands.

"Have you no light here?" said the other, looking round the room.

The old woman, mumbling and shaking her head, and muttering to herself about her handsome daughter, brought a candle from a cupboard in the corner, and thrusting it into the fire with a trembling hand, lighted it with some difficulty and set it on the table. Its dirty wick burnt dimly at first, being choked in its own grease; and when the bleared eyes and failing sight of the old woman could distinguish anything by its light, her visitor was sitting with her arms folded, her eyes turned downwards, and a handkerchief she had worn upon her head lying on the table by her side.

"She sent to me by word of mouth then, my gal, Alice?" mumbled the old woman, after waiting for some moments. "What did she say?"

"Look," returned the visitor.

The old woman repeated the word in a scared uncertain way; and, shading her eyes, looked at the speaker, round the room, and at the speaker once again.

"Alice said look again, mother;" and the speaker fixed her eyes upon her.

Again the old woman looked round the room, and at her visitor, and round the room once more. Hastily seizing the candle, and rising from her seat, she held it to the visitor's face,

uttered a loud cry, set down the light, and fell upon her neck!

"It's my gal! It's my Alice! It's my handsome daughter, living and come back!" screamed the old woman, rocking herself to and fro upon the breast that coldly suffered her embrace. "It's my gal! It's my Alice! It's my handsome daughter, living and come back!" she screamed again, dropping on the floor before her, clasping her knees, laying her head against them, and still rocking herself to and fro with every frantic demonstration of which her vitality was capable.

"Yes, mother," returned Alice, stooping forward for a moment and kissing her, but endeavouring, even in the act, to disengage herself from her embrace. "I am here, at last. Let go, mother; let go. Get up, and sit in your chair. What good does this do?"

"She's come back harder than she went!" cried the mother, looking up in her face, and still holding to her knees. "She don't care for me! after all these years, and all the wretched life I've led!"

"Why, mother!" said Alice, shaking her ragged skirts to detach the old woman from them: "there are two sides to that. There have been years for me as well as you, and there has been wretchedness for me as well as you. Get up, get up!"

Her mother rose, and cried, and wrung her hands, and stood at a little distance gazing on her. Then, she took the candle again, and going round her, surveyed her from head to foot, making a low moaning all the time. Then she put the candle down, resumed her chair, and beating her hands together to a kind of weary tune, and rolling herself from side to side, continued moaning and wailing to herself.

Alice got up, took off her wet cloak, and laid it aside. That done, she sat down as before, and with her arms folded, and

her eyes gazing at the fire, remained silently listening with a contemptuous face to her old mother's inarticulate complainings.

"Did you expect to see me return as youthful as I went away, mother?" she said at length, turning her eyes upon the old woman. "Did you think a foreign life, like mine, was good for good looks? One would believe so, to hear you!"

"It a'nt that!" cried the mother. "*She* knows it!"

"What is it then?" returned the daughter. "It had best be something that don't last, mother, or my way out is easier than my way in."

"Hear that!" exclaimed the mother. "After all these years she threatens to desert me in the moment of her coming back again!"

"I tell you, mother, for the second time, there have been years for me as well as you," said Alice. "Come back harder? Of course I have come back harder. What else did you expect?"

"Harder to me! To her own dear mother!" cried the old woman.

"I don't know who began to harden me, if my own dear mother didn't," she returned, sitting with her folded arms, and knitted brows, and compressed lips, as if she were bent on excluding, by force, every softer feeling from her breast. "Listen, mother, to a word or two. If we understand each other now, we shall not fall out any more, perhaps. I went away a girl, and have come back a woman. I went away undutiful enough, and have come back no better, you may swear. But have you been very dutiful to me?"

"I!" cried the old woman. "To my own gal! A mother dutiful to her own child!"

"It sounds unnatural, don't it?" returned the daughter, looking coldly on her with her stern, regardless, hardy, beautiful face; "but I have thought of it sometimes, in the course of *my* lone years, till I have got used to it. I have heard some talk about

duty first and last; but it has always been of my duty to other people. I have wondered now and then—to pass away the time—whether no one ever owed any duty to me.”

Her mother sat mowing, and mumbling, and shaking her head, but whether angrily, or remorsefully, or in denial, or only in her physical infirmity, did not appear.

“There was a child called Alice Marwood,” said the daughter, with a laugh, and looking down at herself in terrible derision of herself, “born among poverty and neglect, and nursed in it. Nobody taught her, nobody stepped forward to help her, nobody cared for her.”

“Nobody!” echoed the mother, pointing to herself, and striking her breast.

“The only care she knew,” returned the daughter, “was to be beaten, and stinted, and abused sometimes; and she might have done better without that. She lived in homes like this, and in the streets, with a crowd of little wretches like herself; and yet she brought good looks out of this childhood. So much the worse for her. She had better have been hunted and worried to death for ugliness.”

“Go on! go on!” exclaimed the mother.

“I am going on,” returned the daughter. “There was a girl called Alice Marwood. She was handsome. She was taught too late, and taught all wrong. She was too well cared for, too well trained, too well helped on, too much looked after. You were very fond of her—you were better off then. What came to that girl, comes to thousands every year. It was only ruin, and she was born to it.”

“After all these years!” whined the old woman. “My gal begins with this.”

“She ’ll soon have ended,” said the daughter. “There was a criminal called Alice Marwood—a girl still, but deserted and an outcast. And she was tried, and she was sentenced. And

lord, how the gentlemen in the court talked about it! and how grave the judge was, on her duty, and on her having perverted the gifts of nature — as if he didn't know better than anybody there, that they had been made curses to her! — and how he preached about the strong arm of the Law — so very strong to save her, when she was an innocent and helpless little wretch! — and how solemn and religious it all was! I have thought of that, many times since, to be sure!”

She folded her arms tightly on her breast, and laughed in a tone that made the howl of the old woman musical.

“So Alice Marwood was transported, mother,” she pursued, “and was sent to learn her duty, where there was twenty times less duty, and more wickedness, and wrong, and infamy, than here. And Alice Marwood is come back a woman. Such a woman as she ought to be, after all this. In good time, there will be more solemnity, and more fine talk, and more strong arm, most likely, and there will be an end of her; but the gentlemen needn't be afraid of being thrown out of work. There's crowds of little wretches, boy and girl, growing up in any of the streets they live in, that'll keep them to it ill they've made their fortunes.”

The old woman leaned her elbows on the table, and resting her face upon her two hands, made a show of being in great distress — or really was, perhaps.

“There! I have done, mother,” said the daughter, with a motion of her head, as if in dismissal of the subject. “I have said enough. Don't let you and I talk of being dutiful, whatever we do. Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us. I don't want to blame you, or to defend myself; why should I? That's all over, long ago. But I am a woman — not a girl, now — and you and I needn't make a show of our history, like the gentlemen in the Court. *We* know all about it, well enough.”

Lost and degraded as she was, there was a beauty in her, both of face and form, which, even in its worst expression, could not but be recognised as such by any one regarding her with the least attention. As she subsided into silence, and her face which had been harshly agitated, quieted down; while her dark eyes, fixed upon the fire, exchanged the reckless light that had animated them, for one that was softened by something like sorrow; there shone through all her wayworn misery and fatigue, a ray of the departed radiance of the fallen angel.

Her mother, after watching her for some time without speaking, ventured to steal her withered hand a little nearer to her across the table; and finding that she permitted this, to touch her face, and smooth her hair. With the feeling, as it seemed, that the old woman was at least sincere in this show of interest, Alice made no movement to check her; so, advancing by degrees, she bound up her daughter's hair afresh, took off her wet shoes, if they deserved the name, spread something dry upon her shoulders, and hovered humbly about her, muttering to herself, as she recognised her old features and expression more and more.

"You are very poor, mother, I see," said Alice, looking round, when she had sat thus for some time.

"Bitter poor, my deary," replied the old woman.

She admired her daughter, and was afraid of her. Perhaps her admiration, such as it was, had originated long ago, when she first found anything that was beautiful appearing in the midst of the squalid fight of her existence. Perhaps her fear was referable, in some sort, to the retrospect she had so lately heard. Be this as it might, she stood, submissively and deferentially, before her child, and inclined her head, as if in a pitiful entreaty to be spared any further reproach.

"How have you lived?"

"By begging, my deary."

"And pilfering, mother?"

"Sometimes, Ally — in a very small way. I am old and timid. I have taken trifles from children now and then, my deary, but not often. I have tramped about the country, pet, and I know what I know. I have watched."

"Watched?" returned the daughter, looking at her.

"I have hung about a family, my deary," said the mother, even more humbly and submissively than before.

"What family?"

"Hush, darling. Don't be angry with me. I did it for the love of you. In memory of my poor gal beyond seas." She put out her hand deprecatingly, and drawing it back again, laid it on her lips.

"Years ago, my deary," she pursued, glancing timidly at the attentive and stern face opposed to her, "I came across his little child, by chance."

"Whose child?"

"Not his, Alice deary; don't look at me like that; not his. How could it be his? You know he has none."

"Whose then?" returned the daughter. "You said his."

"Hush, Ally; you frighten me, deary. Mr. Dombey's — only Mr. Dombey's. Since then, darling, I have seen them often. I have seen *him*."

In uttering this last word, the old woman shrunk and recoiled, as if with a sudden fear that her daughter would strike her. But though the daughter's face was fixed upon her, and expressed the most vehement passion, she remained still: except that she clenched her arms tighter and tighter within each other, on her bosom, as if to restrain them by that means from doing an injury to herself, or some one else, in the blind fury of the wrath that suddenly possessed her.

"Little he thought who I was!" said the old woman, shaking her clenched hand.

"And little he cared!" muttered her daughter, between her teeth.

"But there we were," said the old woman, "face to face. I spoke to him, and he spoke to me. I sat and watched him as he went away down a long grove of trees; and at every step he took I cursed him, soul and body."

"He will thrive in spite of that," returned the daughter disdainfully.

"Aye, he is thriving," said the mother.

She held her peace; for the face and form before her were unshaped by rage. It seemed as if the bosom would burst with the emotions that strove within it. The effort that constrained and held it pent up, was no less formidable than the rage itself: no less bespeaking the violent and dangerous character of the woman who made it. But it succeeded, and she asked, after a silence:

"Is he married?"

"No, deary," said the mother.

"Going to be?"

"Not that I know of, deary. But his master and friend is married. Oh, we may give him joy! We may give 'em all joy!" cried the old woman, hugging herself with her lean arms in her exultation. "Nothing but joy to us will come of that marriage. Mind me!"

The daughter looked at her for an explanation.

"But you are wet and tired; hungry and thirsty," said the old woman, hobbling to the cupboard; "and there's little here, and little —" diving down into her pocket, and jingling a few halfpence on the table — "little here. Have you any money, Alice, deary?"

The covetous, sharp, eager face, with which she asked the question and looked on, as her daughter took out of her bosom the little gift she had so lately received, told almost as much of

the history of this parent and child as the child herself had told in words.

"Is that all?" said the mother.

"I have no more. I should not have this, but for charity."

"But for charity, eh, deary?" said the old woman, bending greedily over the table to look at the money, which she appeared distrustful of her daughter's still retaining in her hand, and gazing on. "Humph! six and six is twelve and six eighteen — so — we must make the most of it. I'll go buy something to eat and drink."

With greater alacrity than might have been expected in one of her appearance — for age and misery seemed to have made her as decrepit as ugly — she began to occupy her trembling hands in tying an old bonnet on her head, and folding a torn shawl about herself: still eyeing the money in her daughter's hand, with the same sharp desire.

"What joy is to come to us of this marriage, mother?" asked the daughter. "You have not told me that."

"The joy," she replied, attiring herself, with fumbling fingers, "of no love at all, and much pride and hate, my deary. The joy of confusion and strife among 'em, proud as they are, and of danger — danger, Alice!"

"What danger?"

"I have seen what I have seen. I know what I know!" chuckled the mother. "Let some look to it. Let some be upon their guard. My gal may keep good company yet!"

Then, seeing that in the wondering earnestness with which her daughter regarded her, her hand involuntarily closed upon the money, the old woman made more speed to secure it, and hurriedly added, "but I'll go buy something; I'll go buy something."

As she stood with her hand stretched out before her daughter,

her daughter, glancing again at the money, put it to her lips before parting with it.

"What, Ally! Do you kiss it?" chuckled the old woman. "That 's like me — I often do. Oh, it 's so good to us!" squeezing her own tarnished halfpence up to her bag of a throat, "so good to us in everything, but not coming in heaps!"

"I kiss it, mother," said the daughter, "or I did then — I don't know that I ever did before — for the giver's sake."

"The giver, eh, deary?" retorted the old woman, whose dimmed eyes glistened as she took it. "Aye! I'll kiss it for the giver's sake, too, when the giver can make it go farther. But I'll go spend it, deary. I'll be back directly."

"You seem to say you know a great deal, mother," said the daughter, following her to the door with her eyes. "You have grown very wise since we parted."

"Know!" croaked the old woman, coming back a step or two. "I know more than you think. I know more than *he* thinks, deary, as I'll tell you by and bye. I know all about him."

The daughter smiled incredulously.

"I know of his brother, Alice," said the old woman, stretching out her neck with a leer of malice absolutely frightful, "who might have been where you have been — for stealing money — and who lives with his sister, over yonder, by the north road out of London."

"Where?"

"By the north road out of London, deary. You shall see the house, if you like. It a'nt much to boast of, genteel as his own is. No, no, no," cried the old woman shaking her head, and laughing; for her daughter had started up, "not now; it's too far off; it's by the milestone, where the stones are heaped; — to-morrow deary, if it's fine, and you are in the humour. But I'll go spend —"

“Stop!” and the daughter flung herself upon her, with her former passion raging like a fire. “The sister is a fair-faced Devil, with brown hair?”

The old woman, amazed and terrified, nodded her head.

“I see the shadow of him in her face! It’s a red house standing by itself. Before the door there is a small green porch.”

Again the old woman nodded.

“In which I sat to-day! Give me back the money.”

“Alice! Deary!”

“Give me back the money, or you’ll be hurt.”

She forced it from the old woman’s hand as she spoke, and utterly indifferent to her complainings and entreaties, threw on the garments she had taken off, and hurried out, with headlong speed.

The mother followed, limping after her as she could, and expostulating with no more effect upon her than upon the wind and rain and darkness that encompassed them. Obdurate and fierce in her own purpose, and indifferent to all besides, the daughter defied the weather and the distance, as if she had known no travel or fatigue, and made for the house where she had been relieved. After some quarter of an hour’s walking, the old woman, spent and out of breath, ventured to hold by her skirts; but she ventured no more, and they travelled on in silence through the wet and gloom. If the mother now and then uttered a word of complaint, she stifled it lest her daughter should break away from her and leave her behind; and the daughter was dumb.

It was within an hour or so of midnight, when they left the regular streets behind them, and entered on the deeper gloom of that neutral ground where the house was situated. The town lay in the distance, lurid and lowering; the bleak wind howled over the open space; all around was black, wild, desolate.

"This is a fit place for me!" said the daughter, stopping to look back. "I thought so, when I was here before, to-day."

"Alice, my deary," cried the mother, pulling her gently by the skirt. "Alice!"

"What now, mother?"

"Don't give the money back, my darling, please don't. We can't afford it. We want supper, deary. Money is money, whoever gives it. Say what you will, but keep the money."

"See there!" was all the daughter's answer. "That is the house I mean. Is that it?"

The old woman nodded in the affirmative; and a few more paces brought them to the threshold. There was the light of fire and candle in the room where Alice had sat to dry her clothes; and on her knocking at the door, John Carker appeared from that room.

He was surprised to see such visitors at such an hour, and asked Alice what she wanted.

"I want your sister," she said. "The woman who gave me money to-day."

At the sound of her raised voice, Harriet came out.

"Oh!" said Alice. "You are here! Do you remember me?"

"Yes," she answered, wondering.

The face that had humbled itself before her, looked on her now with such invincible hatred and defiance; and the hand that had gently touched her arm, was clenched with such a show of evil purpose, as if it would gladly strangle her; that she drew close to her brother for protection.

"That I could speak with you, and not know you! That I could come near you, and not feel what blood was running in your veins, by the tingling of my own!" said Alice, with a menacing gesture.

"What do you mean? What have I done?"

“Done!” returned the other. “You have sat me by your fire; you have given me food and money; you have bestowed your compassion on me! You! whose name I spit upon!”

The old woman, with a malevolence that made her ugliness quite awful, shook her withered hand at the brother and sister in confirmation of her daughter, but plucked her by the skirts again, nevertheless, imploring her to keep the money.

“If I dropped a tear upon your hand, may it wither it up! If I spoke a gentle word in your hearing, may it deafen you! If I touched you with my lips, may the touch be poison to you! A curse upon this roof that gave me shelter! Sorrow and shame upon your head! Ruin upon all belonging to you!”

As she said the words, she threw the money down upon the ground, and spurned it with her foot.

“I tread it in the dust: I wouldn’t take it if it paved my way to Heaven! I would the bleeding foot that brought me here to-day, had rotted off, before it led me to your house!”

Harriet, pale and trembling, restrained her brother, and suffered her to go on uninterrupted.

“It was well that I should be pitied and forgiven by you, or any one of your name, in the first hour of my return! It was well that you should act the kind good lady to me! I’ll thank you when I die; I’ll pray for you, and all your race, you may be sure!”

With a fierce action of her hand, as if she sprinkled hatred on the ground, and with it devoted those who were standing there to destruction, she looked up once at the black sky, and strode out into the wild night.

The mother, who had plucked at her skirts again and again in vain, and had eyed the money lying on the threshold with an absorbing greed that seemed to concentrate her faculties upon it, would have prowled about, until the house was dark, and then groped in the mire on the chance of repossessing herself of it,

But the daughter drew her away, and they set forth, straight, on their return to their dwelling; the old woman whimpering and bemoaning their loss upon the road, and fretfully bewailing, as openly as she dared, the undutiful conduct of her handsome girl in depriving her of a supper, on the very first night of their re-union.

Supperless to bed she went, saving for a few coarse fragments; and those she sat mumbling and munching over a scrap of fire, long after her undutiful daughter lay asleep.

Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social vices sometimes prevailing higher up? In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place? Allowing for great difference of stuff and texture, was the pattern of this woof repeated among gentle blood at all?

Say, Edith Dombey! And Cleopatra, best of mothers, let us have your testimony!

CHAPTER XV.

The happy pair.

THE dark blot on the street is gone. Mr. Dombey's mansion, if it be a gap among the other houses any longer, is only so because it is not to be vied with in its brightness, and haughtily casts them off. The saying is, that home is home, be it never so homely. If it hold good in the opposite contingency, and home is home be it never so stately, what an altar to the Household Gods is raised up here!

Lights are sparkling in the windows this evening, and the ruddy glow of fires is warm and bright upon the hangings and

soft carpets, and the dinner waits to be served, and the dinner-table is handsomely set forth, though only for four persons, and the sideboard is cumbrous with plate. It is the first time that the house has been arranged for occupation since its late changes, and the happy pair are looked for every minute.

Only second to the wedding morning, in the interest and expectation it engenders among the household, is this evening of the coming home. Mrs. Perch is in the kitchen taking tea; and has made the tour of the establishment, and priced the silks and damasks by the yard, and exhausted every interjection in the dictionary and out of it expressive of admiration and wonder. The upholsterer's foreman, who has left his hat, with a pocket-handkerchief in it, both smelling strongly of varnish, under a chair in the hall, lurks about the house, gazing upward at the cornices, and downward at the carpets, and occasionally, in a silent transport of enjoyment, taking a rule out of his pocket, and skirmishingly measuring expensive objects, with unutterable feelings. Cook is in high spirits, and says give *her* a place where there's plenty of company (as she'll bet you sixpence there will be now), for she is of a lively disposition, and she always was from a child, and she don't mind who knows it; which sentiment elicits from the breast of Mrs. Perch a responsive murmur of support and approbation. All the housemaid hopes is, happiness for 'em—but marriage is a lottery, and the more she thinks about it, the more she feels the independence and the safety of a single life. Mr. Towlinson is saturnine and grim, and says that's his opinion too, and give him War besides, and down with the French—for this young man has a general impression that every foreigner is a Frenchman, and must be by the laws of nature.

At each new sound of wheels, they all stop, whatever they are saying, and listen; and more than once there is a general starting up and a cry of "Here they are!" But here they are not yet; and Cook begins to mourn over the dinner, which has been put back

twice, and the upholsterer's foreman still goes lurking about the rooms, undisturbed in his blissful reverie!

Florence is ready to receive her father and her new mama. Whether the emotions that are throbbing in her breast originate in pleasure or in pain, she hardly knows. But the fluttering heart sends added colour to her cheeks, and brightness to her eyes; and they say down stairs, drawing their heads together — for they always speak softly when they speak of her—how beautiful Miss Florence looks to-night, and what a sweet young lady she has grown, poor dear! A pause succeeds; and then Cook, feeling, as president, that her sentiments are waited for, wonders whether—and there stops. The housemaid wonders too, and so does Mrs. Perch, who has the happy social faculty of always wondering when other people wonder, without being at all particular what she wonders at. Mr. Towlinson, who now describes an opportunity of bringing down the spirits of the ladies to his own level, says wait and see: he wishes some people were well out of this. Cook leads a sigh then, and a murmur of “Ah, it's a strange world,—it is indeed!” and when it has gone round the table, adds persuasively, “but Miss Florence can't well be the worse for any change, Tom.” Mr. Towlinson's rejoinder, pregnant with frightful meaning, is “Oh, can't she though!” and sensible that a mere man can scarcely be more prophetic, or improve upon that, he holds his peace.

Mrs. Skewton, prepared to greet her darling daughter and dear son-in-law with open arms, is appropriately attired for that purpose in a very youthful costume, with short sleeves. At present, however, her ripe charms are blooming in the shade of her own apartments, whence she has not emerged since she took possession of them a few hours ago, and where she is fast growing fretful, on account of the postponement of dinner. The maid who ought to be a skeleton, but is in truth a buxom damsel, is, on the other hand, in a most amiable state: considering her quarterly

stipend much safer than heretofore, and foreseeing a great improvement in her board and lodging.

Where are the happy pair, for whom this brave home is waiting? Do steam, tide, wind, and horses, all abate their speed, to linger on such happiness? Does the swarm of loves and graces hovering about them retard their progress by its numbers? Are there so many flowers in their happy path, that they can scarcely move along, without entanglement in thornless roses, and sweetest briar?

They are here at last! The noise of wheels is heard, grows louder, and a carriage drives up to the door! A thundering knock from the obnoxious foreigner anticipates the rush of Mr. Towlison and party to open it; and Mr. Dombey and his bride alight, and walk in arm and arm.

"My sweetest Edith!" cries an agitated voice upon the stairs. "My dearest Dombey!" and the short sleeves wreath themselves about the happy couple in turn, and embrace them.

Florence had come down to the hall too, but did not advance: reserving her timid welcome until these nearer and dearer transports should subside. But the eyes of Edith sought her out, upon the threshold; and dismissing her sensitive parent with a slight kiss on the cheek, she hurried on to Florence, and embraced her.

"How do you do, Florence?" said Mr. Dombey, putting out his hand.

As Florence, trembling, raised it to her lips, she met his glance. The look was cold and distant enough, but it stirred her heart to think that she observed in it something more of interest than he had ever shown before. It even expressed a kind of faint surprise, and not a disagreeable surprise, at sight of her. She dared not raise her eyes to his any more; but she felt that he looked at her once again, and not less favourably. Oh what a thrill of joy shot through her, awakened by even this intangible

and baseless confirmation of her hope that she would learn to win him, through her new and beautiful mama!

"You will not be long dressing, Mrs. Dombey, I presume?" said Mr. Dombey.

"I shall be ready immediately."

"Let them send up dinner in a quarter of an hour."

With that Mr. Dombey stalked away to his own dressing-room, and Mrs. Dombey went up stairs to hers. Mrs. Skewton and Florence repaired to the drawing-room, where that excellent mother considered it incumbent on her to shed a few irrepressible tears, supposed to be forced from her by her daughter's felicity; and which she was still drying, very gingerly, with a laced corner of her pocket-handkerchief, when her son-in-law appeared.

"And how my dearest Dombey did you find that delightfulest of cities, Paris?" she asked, subduing her emotion.

"It was cold," returned Mr. Dombey.

"Gay as ever," said Mrs. Skewton, "of course."

"Not particularly. I thought it dull," said Mr. Dombey.

"Fie my dearest Dombey!" archly; "dull!"

"It made that impression upon me, Madam," said Mr. Dombey with grave politeness. "I believe Mrs. Dombey found it dull too. She mentioned once or twice that she thought it so."

"Why, you naughty girl!" cried Mrs. Skewton, rallying her dear child, who now entered, "what dreadfully heretical things have you been saying about Paris?"

Edith raised her eyebrows with an air of weariness; and passing the folding-doors which were thrown open to display the suite of rooms in their new and handsome garniture, and barely glancing at them as she passed, sat down by Florence.

"My dear Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, "how charmingly these people have carried out every idea that we hinted. They have made a perfect palace of the house, positively."

“It is handsome,” said Mr. Dombey, looking round. “I directed that no expense should be spared; and all that money could do, has been done, I believe.”

“And what can it no do, dear Dombey?” observed Cleopatra.

“It is powerful, Madam,” said Mr. Dombey.

He looked in his solemn way towards his wife, but not a word said she.

“I hope Mrs. Dombey,” addressing her after a moment’s silence, with especial distinctness; “that these alterations meet with your approval?”

“They are as handsome as they can be,” she returned, with haughty carelessness. “They should be so, of course. And I suppose they are.”

An expression of scorn was habitual to the proud face, and seemed inseparable from it; but the contempt with which it received any appeal to admiration, respect, or consideration on the ground of his riches, no matter how slight or ordinary in itself, was a new and different expression, unequalled in intensity by any other of which it was capable. Whether Mr. Dombey, wrapped in his own greatness, was at all aware of this, or no, there had not been wanting opportunities already for his complete enlightenment; and at that moment it might have been effected by the one glance of the dark eye that lighted on him, after it had rapidly and scornfully surveyed the theme of his self-glorification. He might have read in that one glance that nothing that his wealth could do, though it were increased ten thousand fold, could win him for its own sake, one look of softened recognition from the defiant woman, linked to him, but arrayed with her whole soul against him. He might have read in that one glance that even for its sordid and mercenary influence upon herself, she spurned it, while she claimed its utmost power as her right, her bargain—as the base and worthless recompense for which she had become

his wife. He might have read in it that, ever baring her own head for the lightning of her own contempt and pride to strike, the most innocent allusion to the power of his riches degraded her anew, sunk her deeper in her own respect, and made the blight and waste within her, more complete.

But dinner was announced, and Mr. Dombey led down Cleopatra; Edith and his daughter following. Sweeping past the gold and silver demonstration on the sideboard as if it were heaped-up dirt, and deigning to bestow no look upon the elegancies around her, she took her place at his board for the first time, and sat, like a statue, at the feast.

Mr. Dombey, being a good deal in the statue way himself, was well enough pleased to see his handsome wife immoveable and proud and cold. Her deportment being always elegant and graceful, this as a general behaviour, was agreeable and congenial to him. Presiding, therefore, with his accustomed dignity, and not at all reflecting on his wife by any warmth or hilarity of his own, he performed his share of the honours of the table with a cool satisfaction; and the installation dinner, though not regarded down-stairs as a great success or very promising beginning, passed off, above, in a sufficiently polite, genteel, and frosty manner.

Soon after tea, Mrs. Skewton, who affected to be quite overcome and worn out by her emotions of happiness, arising in the contemplation of her dear child united to the man of her heart, but who, there is reason to suppose, found this family party somewhat dull, as she yawned for one hour continually behind her fan, retired to bed. Edith, also, silently withdrew and came back no more. Thus, it happened that Florence, who had been up-stairs to have some conversation with Diogenes, returning to the drawing-room with her little work-basket, found no one there but her father, who was walking to and fro, in dreary magnificence.

"I beg your pardon. Shall I go away, Papa?" said Florence faintly, hesitating at the door.

"No," returned Mr. Dombey, looking round over his shoulder; "you can come and go here, Florence, as you please. This is not my private room."

Florence entered, and sat down at a distant little table with her work: finding herself for the first time in her life — for the very first time within her memory from her infancy to that hour — alone with her father, as his companion. She, his natural companion, his only child, who in her lonely life and grief had known the suffering of a breaking heart; who, in her rejected love, had never breathed his name to God at night, but with a tearful blessing, heavier on him than a curse; who had prayed to die young, so she might only die in his arms; who had, all through, repaid the agony of slight and coldness, and dislike, with patient unexacting love, excusing him, and pleading for him, like his better angel!

She trembled, and her eyes were dim. His figure seemed to grow in height and bulk before her as he paced the room: now it was all blurred and indistinct; now clear again, and plain; and now she seemed to think that this had happened, just the same, a multitude of years ago. She yearned towards him, and yet shrunk from his approach. Unnatural emotion in a child, innocent of wrong! Unnatural the hand that had directed the sharp plough, which furrowed up her gentle nature for the sowing of its seeds!

Bent upon not distressing or offending him by her distress, Florence controlled herself, and sat quietly at her work. After a few more turns across and across the room, he left off pacing it; and withdrawing into a shadowy corner at some distance, where there was an easy chair, covered his head with a handkerchief, and composed himself to sleep.

It was enough for Florence to sit there, watching him; turning

her eyes towards his chair from time to time; watching him with her thoughts, when her face was intent upon her work; and sorrowfully glad to think that he *could* sleep, while she was there, and that he was not made restless by her strange and long-forbidden presence.

What would have been her thoughts if she had known that he was steadily regarding her; that the veil upon his face, by accident or by design, was so adjusted that his sight was free, and that it never wandered from her face an instant. That when she looked towards him, in the obscure dark corner, her speaking eyes, more earnest and pathetic in their voiceless speech than all the orators of all the world, and impeaching him more nearly in their mute address, met his, and did not know it. That when she bent her head again over her work, he drew his breath more easily, but with the same attention looked upon her still — upon her white brow and her falling hair, and busy hands; and once attracted, seemed to have no power to turn his eyes away!

And what were his thoughts meanwhile? With what emotions did he prolong the attentive gaze covertly directed on his unknown daughter? Was there reproach to him in the quiet figure and the mild eyes? Had he begun to feel her disregarded claims, and did they touch him home at last, and waken him to some sense of his cruel injustice?

There are yielding moments in the lives of the sternest and harshest men, though such men often keep their secret well. The sight of her in her beauty, almost changed into a woman without his knowledge, may have struck out some such moments even in his life of pride. Some passing thought that he had had a happy home within his reach — had had a household spirit bending at his feet — had overlooked it in his stiff-necked sullen arrogance, and wandered away and lost himself, may have engendered them. Some simple eloquence distinctly heard, though only uttered in her eyes, unconscious that he read them, as “By the death-beds

I have tended, by the childhood I have suffered, by our meeting in this dreary house at midnight, by the cry wrung from me in the anguish of my heart, oh, father, turn to me and seek a refuge in my love before it is too late!" may have arrested them. Meaner and lower thoughts, as that his dead boy was now superseded by new ties, and he could forgive the having been supplanted in his affection, may have occasioned them. The mere association of her as an ornament, with all the ornament and pomp about him, may have been sufficient. But as he looked, he softened to her, more and more. As he looked, she became blended with the child he had loved, and he could hardly separate the two. As he looked, he saw her for an instant by a clearer and a brighter light, not bending over that child's pillow as his rival — monstrous thought — but as the spirit of his home, and in the action tending himself no less, as he sat once more with his bowed-down head upon his hand at the foot of the little bed. He felt inclined to speak to her, and call her to him. The words "Florence, come here!" were rising to his lips — but slowly and with difficulty, they were so very strange — when they were checked and stifled by a footstep on the stair.

It was his wife's. She had exchanged her dinner dress for a loose robe, and unbound her hair, which fell freely about her neck. But this was not the change in her that startled him.

"Florence, dear," she said, "I have been looking for you everywhere."

As she sat down by the side of Florence, she stooped and kissed her hand. He hardly knew his wife. She was so changed. It was not merely that her smile was new to him — though that he had never seen; but her manner, the tone of her voice, the light of her eyes, the interest, and confidence, and winning wish to please, expressed in all — this was not Edith.

"Softly, dear Mama. Papa is asleep."

It was Edith now. She looked towards the corner where he was, and he knew that face and manner very well.

"I scarcely thought you could be here, Florence."

Again, how altered and how softened, in an instant!

"I left here early," pursued Edith, "purposely to sit up-stairs and talk with you. But, going to your room, I found my bird was flown, and I have been waiting there ever since, expecting its return."

If it had been a bird, indeed, she could not have taken it more tenderly and gently to her breast, than she did Florence.

"Come, dear!"

"Papa will not expect to find me, I suppose, when he wakes," hesitated Florence.

"Do you think he will, Florence?" said Edith, looking full upon her.

Florence drooped her head, and rose, and put up her work-basket. Edith drew her hand through her arm, and they went out of the room like sisters. Her very step was different and new to him, Mr. Dombey thought, as his eyes followed her to the door.

He sat in his shadowy corner so long, that the church clocks struck the hour three times before he moved that night. All that while his face was still intent upon the spot where Florence had been seated. The room grew darker, as the candles waned and went out; but a darkness gathered on his face, exceeding any that the night could cast, and rested there.

Florence and Edith, seated before the fire in the remote room where little Paul had died, talked together for a long time. Diogenes, who was of the party, had at first objected to the admission of Edith, and, even in deference to his mistress's wish, had only permitted it under growling protest. But, emerging by little and little from the ante-room, whither he had retired in dudgeon, he soon appeared to comprehend, that with the most amiable inten-

tions he had made one of those mistakes which will occasionally arise in the best-regulated dogs' minds; as a friendly apology for which he stuck himself up on end between the two, in a very hot place in front of the fire, and sat panting at it, with his tongue out, and a most imbecile expression of countenance, listening to the conversation.

It turned, at first, on Florence's books and favourite pursuits, and on the manner in which she had beguiled the interval since the marriage. The last theme opened up to her a subject which lay very near her heart, and she said, with the tears starting to her eyes:

"Oh, Mama! I have had a great sorrow since that day."

"You a great sorrow, Florence!"

"Yes. Poor Walter is drowned."

Florence spread her hands before her face, and wept with all her heart. Many as were the secret tears which Walter's fate had cost her, they flowed yet, when she thought or spoke of him.

"But tell me, dear," said Edith, soothing her. "Who was Walter? What was he to you?"

"He was my brother, Mama. After dear Paul died, we said we would be brother and sister. I had known him a long time — from a little child. He knew Paul, who liked him very much; Paul said, almost at the last, 'Take care of Walter, dear Papa! I was fond of him!' Walter had been brought in to see him, and was there then — in this room."

"And *did* he take care of Walter?" inquired Edith, sternly.

"Papa? He appointed him to go abroad. He was drowned in shipwreck on his voyage," said Florence, sobbing.

"Does he know that he is dead?" asked Edith.

"I cannot tell, Mama. I have no means of knowing. Dear Mama!" cried Florence, clinging to her, as for help, and hiding her face upon her bosom, "I know that you have seen —"

"Stay! Stop, Florence." Edith turned so pale, and spoke so

earnestly, that Florence did not need her restraining hand upon her lips. "Tell me all about Walter first; let me understand this history all through."

Florence related it, and everything belonging to it, even down to the friendship of Mr. Toots, of whom she could hardly speak in her distress without a tearful smile, although she was deeply grateful to him. When she had concluded her account, to the whole of which Edith, holding her hand, listened with close attention, and when a silence had succeeded, Edith said:

"What is it that you know I have seen, Florence?"

"That I am not," said Florence, with the same mute appeal, and the same quick concealment of her face as before, "that I am not a favourite child, Mama. I never have been. I have never known how to be. I have missed the way, and had no one to show it to me. Oh, let me learn from you how to become dearer to Papa. Teach me! you, who can so well!" and clinging closer to her, with some broken fervent words of gratitude and endearment, Florence, relieved of her sad secret, wept long, but not as painfully as of yore, within the encircling arms of her new mother.

Pale, even to her lips, and with a face that strove for composure until its proud beauty was as fixed as death, Edith looked down upon the weeping girl, and once kissed her. Then, gradually disengaging herself, and putting Florence away, she said, stately and quiet, as a marble image, and in a voice that deepened as she spoke, but had no other token of emotion in it:

"Florence, you do not know me! Heaven forbid that you should learn from me!"

"Not learn from you?" repeated Florence, in surprise.

"That I should teach you how to love, or be loved, Heaven forbid!" said Edith. "If you could teach me, that were better; but it is too late. You are dear to me, Florence. I did not think

that anything could ever be so dear to me, as you are in this little time."

She saw that Florence would have spoken here, so checked her with her hand, and went on.

"I will be your true friend always. I will cherish you, as much, if not as well as any one in this world could. You may trust in me — I know it and I say it, dear — with the whole confidence even of your pure heart. There are hosts of women whom he might have married, better and truer in all other respects than I am, Florence; but there is not one who could come here, his wife, whose heart could beat with greater truth to you than mine does."

"I know it, dear Mama!" cried Florence. "From that first most happy day I have known it."

"Most happy day!" Edith seemed to repeat the words involuntarily, and went on. "Though the merit is not mine, for I thought little of you until I saw you, let the undeserved reward be mine in your trust and love. And in this — in this, Florence; on the first night of my taking up my abode here; I am led on as it is best I should be, to say it for the first and last time."

Florence, without knowing why, felt almost afraid to hear her proceed, but kept her eyes rivetted on the beautiful face so fixed upon her own.

"Never seek to find in me," said Edith, laying her hand upon her breast, "what is not here. Never if you can help it, Florence, fall off from me because it is *not* here. Little by little you will know me better, and the time will come when you will know me, as I know myself. Then, be as lenient to me as you can, and do not turn to bitterness the only sweet remembrance I shall have."

The tears that were visible in her eyes as she kept them fixed on Florence, showed that the composed face was but as a handsome mask; but she preserved it, and continued:

"I *have* seen what you say, and know how true it is. But be-

lieve me — you will soon, if you cannot now — there is no one on this earth less qualified to set it right or help you, Florence, than I. Never ask me why, or speak to me about it or of my husband, more. There should be, so far, a division, and a silence between us two, like the grave itself.”

She sat for some time silent; Florence scarcely venturing to breathe meanwhile, as dim and imperfect shadows of the truth, and all its daily consequences, chased each other through her terrified, yet incredulous imagination. Almost as soon as she had ceased to speak, Edith's face began to subside from its set composure to that quieter and more relenting aspect, which it usually wore when she and Florence were alone together. She shaded it, after this change, with her hands; and when she arose, and with an affectionate embrace bade Florence good night, went quickly, and without looking round.

But when Florence was in bed, and the room was dark except for the glow of the fire, Edith returned, and saying that she could not sleep, and that her dressing-room was lonely, drew a chair upon the hearth, and watched the embers as they died away. Florence watched them too from her bed, until they, and the noble figure before them, crowned with its flowing hair, and in its thoughtful eyes reflecting back their light, became confused and indistinct, and finally were lost in slumber.

In her sleep, however, Florence could not lose an undefined impression of what had so recently passed. It formed the subject of her dreams, and haunted her; now in one shape, now in another; but always oppressively; and with a sense of fear. She dreamed of seeking her father in wildernesses, of following his track up fearful heights, and down into deep mines and caverns; of being charged with something that would release him from extraordinary suffering — she knew not what, or why — yet never being able to attain the goal and set him free. Then, she saw him dead, upon that very bed, and in that very room, and

knew that he had never loved her to the last, and fell upon his cold breast, passionately weeping. Then, a prospect opened, and a river flowed, and a plaintive voice she knew, cried, "It is running on, Floy! It has never stopped! You are moving with it!" And she saw him at a distance stretching out his arms towards her, while a figure such as Walter's used to be, stood near him, awfully serene and still. In every vision, Edith came and went, sometimes to her joy, sometimes to her sorrow, until they were alone upon the brink of a dark grave, and Edith pointing down, she looked and saw — what! — another Edith lying at the bottom.

In the terror of this dream, she cried out, and awoke, she thought. A soft voice seemed to whisper in her ear, "Florence, dear Florence, it is nothing but a dream!" and stretching out her arms, she returned the caress of her new mama, who then went out at the door in the light of the grey morning. In a moment, Florence sat up wondering whether this had really taken place or not; but she was only certain that it was grey morning indeed, and that the blackened ashes of the fire were on the hearth, and that she was alone.

So passed the night on which the happy pair came home.

CHAPTER XVI.

Housewarming.

MANY succeeding days passed in like manner; except that there were numerous visits received and paid, and that Mrs. Skewton held little levees in her own apartments, at which Major Bagstock was a frequent attendant, and that Florence encountered no second look from her father, although she saw him every day. Nor had she much communication in words with her new mama, who was imperious and proud to all the house but her — Florence could not but observe that — and who, al-

though she always sent for her or went to her when she came home from visiting, and would always go into her room at night, before retiring to rest, however late the hour, and never lost an opportunity of being with her, was often her silent and thoughtful companion for a long time together.

Florence, who had hoped for so much from this marriage, could not help sometimes comparing the bright house with the faded dreary place out of which it had arisen, and wondering when, in any shape, it would begin to be a home; for that it was no home then, for any one, though everything went on luxuriously and regularly, she had always a secret misgiving. Many an hour of sorrowful reflection by day and night, and many a tear of blighted hope, Florence bestowed upon the assurance her new mama had given her so strongly, that there was no one on the earth more powerless than herself to teach her how to win her father's heart. And soon Florence began to think — resolved to think, would be the truer phrase — that as no one knew so well, how hopeless of being subdued or changed her father's coldness to her was, so she had given her this warning, and forbidden the subject, in very compassion. Unselfish here, as in her every act and fancy, Florence preferred to bear the pain of this new wound, rather than encourage any faint foreshadowings of the truth as it concerned her father; tender of him, even in her wandering thoughts. As for his home, she hoped it would become a better one, when its state of novelty and transition should be over; and for herself, thought little and lamented less.

If none of the new family were particularly at home in private, it was resolved that Mrs. Dombey at least should be at home in public, without delay. A series of entertainments in celebration of the late nuptials, and in cultivation of society, were arranged, chiefly by Mr. Dombey and Mrs. Skewton; and it was settled that the festive proceedings should commence by

Mrs. Dombey's being at home upon a certain evening, and by Mr. and Mrs. Dombey's requesting the honour of the company of a great many incongruous people to dinner on the same day.

Accordingly Mr. Dombey produced a list of sundry eastern magnates who were to be bidden to this feast, on his behalf; to which Mrs. Skewton, acting for her dearest child, who was haughtily careless on the subject, subjoined a western list, comprising Cousin Feenix, not yet returned to Baden Baden, greatly to the detriment of his personal estate; and a variety of moths of various degrees and ages, who had, at various times, fluttered round the light of her fair daughter, or herself, without any lasting injury to their wings. Florence was enrolled as a member of the dinner-party, by Edith's command — elicited by a moment's doubt and hesitation on the part of Mrs. Skewton; and Florence, with a wondering heart, and with a quick instinctive sense of everything that grated on her father, in the least, took her silent share in the proceedings of the day.

The proceedings commenced by Mr. Dombey, in a cravat of extraordinary height and stiffness, walking restlessly about the drawing-room until the hour appointed for dinner; punctual to which, an East India Director, of immense wealth, in a waistcoat apparently constructed in serviceable deal by some plain carpenter, but really engendered in the tailor's art, and composed of the material called nankeen, arrived, and was received by Mr. Dombey alone. The next stage of the proceedings was Mr. Dombey's sending his compliments to Mrs. Dombey, with as correct statement of the time; and the next, the East India Director's falling prostrate, in a conversational point of view, and, as Mr. Dombey was not the man to pick him up, staring at the fire until rescue appeared, in the shape of Mrs. Skewton; whom the Director, as a pleasant start in life for the evening, mistook for Mrs. Dombey, and greeted with enthusiasm.

The next arrival was a Bank Director, reputed to be able to buy up anything — human Nature generally, if he should take it in his head to influence the money market in that direction — but who was a wonderfully modest spoken man, almost boastfully so, and mentioned his “little place” at Kingston-upon-Thames, and its just being barely equal to giving Dombey a bed and a chop, if he would come and visit it. Ladies, he said, it was not for a man who lived in his quiet way to take upon himself to invite — but if Mrs. Skewton and her daughter, Mrs. Dombey, should ever find themselves in that direction, and would do him the honour to look at a little bit of a shrubbery they would find there, and a poor little flower-bed or so, and a humble apology for a pinery, and two or three little attempts of that sort without any pretension, they would distinguish him very much. Carrying out his character, this gentleman was very plainly dressed, in a wisp of cambric for a neckcloth, big shoes, a coat that was too loose for him, and a pair of trowsers that were too spare; and mention being made of the Opera by Mrs. Skewton, he said he very seldom went there, for he couldn’t afford it. It seemed greatly to delight and exhilarate him to say so; and he beamed on his audience afterwards, with his hands in his pockets, and excessive satisfaction twinkling in his eyes.

Now Mrs. Dombey appeared, beautiful and proud, and as disdainful and defiant of them all as if the bridal wreath upon her head had been a garland of steel spikes put on to force concession from her which she would die sooner than yield. With her was Florence. When they entered together, the shadow of the night of the return again darkened Mr. Dombey’s face. But unobserved; for Florence did not venture to raise her eyes to his, and Edith’s indifference was too supreme to take the least heed of him.

The arrivals quickly became numerous. More directors, chairmen of public companies, elderly ladies carrying burdens

on their heads for full dress, Cousin Feenix, Major Bagstock, friends of Mrs. Skewton, with the same bright bloom on their complexion, and very precious necklaces on very withered necks. Among these, a young lady of sixty-five, remarkably coolly dressed as to her back and shoulders, who spoke with an engaging lisp, and whose eyelids wouldn't keep up well, without a great deal of trouble on her part, and whose manners had that indefinable charm which so frequently attaches to the giddiness of youth. As the greater part of Mr. Dombey's list were disposed to be taciturn, and the greater part of Mrs. Dombey's list were disposed to be talkative, and there was no sympathy between them, Mrs. Dombey's list, by magnetic agreement, entered into a bond of union against Mr. Dombey's list, who, wandering about the rooms in a desolate manner, or seeking refuge in corners, entangled themselves with company coming in, and became barricaded behind sofas, and had doors opened smartly from without against their heads, and underwent every sort of discomforture.

When dinner was announced, Mr. Dombey took down an old lady like a crimson velvet pincushion stuffed with bank notes, who might have been the identical old lady of Threadneedle-street, she was so rich, and looked so unaccommodating; Cousin Feenix took down Mrs. Dombey; Major Bastock took down Mrs. Skewton; the young thing with the shoulders was bestowed, as an extinguisher, upon the East India Director; and the remaining ladies were left on view in the drawing-room by the remaining gentlemen, until a forlorn hope volunteered to conduct them down stairs, and those brave spirits with their captives blocked up the dining-room door, shutting out seven mild men in the stony-hearted hall. When all the rest were got in and were seated, one of these mild men still appeared, in smiling confusion, totally destitute and unprovided for, and, escorted by the butler, made the complete circuit of the table twice before his chair

could be found, which it finally was, on Mrs. Dombey's left hand; after which the mild man never held up his head again.

Now, the spacious dining-room, with the company seated round the glittering table, busy with their glittering spoons, and knives and forks, and plates, might have been taken for a grown-up exposition of Tom Tiddler's ground, where children pick up gold and silver. Mr. Dombey, as Tiddler, looked his character to admiration; and the long plateau of precious metal frosted, separating him from Mrs. Dombey, whereon frosted Cupids offered scentless flowers to each of them, was allegorical to see.

Cousin Feenix was in great force, and looked astonishingly young. But he was sometimes thoughtless in his good humour — his memory occasionally wandering like his legs — and on this occasion caused the company to shudder. It happened thus. The young lady with the back, who regarded Cousin Feenix with sentiments of tenderness, had entrapped the East India Director into leading her to the chair next him; in return for which good office, she immediately abandoned the Director, who being shaded on the other side by a gloomy black velvet hat surmounting a bony and speechless female with a fan, yielded to a depression of spirits and withdrew into himself. Cousin Feenix and the young lady were very lively and humorous, and the young lady laughed so much at something Cousin Feenix related to her, that Major Bagstock begged leave to inquire on behalf of Mrs. Skewton (they were sitting opposite, a little lower down), whether that might not be considered public property.

“Why, upon my life,” said Cousin Feenix, “there's nothing in it; it really is not worth repeating: in point of fact, it's merely an anecdote of Jack Adams. I dare say my friend Dombey;” for the general attention was concentrated on Cousin Feenix; “may remember Jack Adam's, Jack Adams, not Joe; that was his brother. Jack — little Jack — man with a cast in his eye, and a slight impediment in his speech — man who sat for

somebody's borough. We used to call him in my parliamentary time W. P. Adams, in consequence of his being Warming Pan for a young fellow who was in his minority. Perhaps my friend Dombey may have known the man?"

Mr. Dombey, who was as likely to have known Guy Fawkes, replied in the negative. But one of the seven mild men unexpectedly leaped into distinction, by saying *he* had known him, and adding — "always wore Hessian boots!"

"Exactly," said Cousin Feenix, bending forward to see the mild man, and smile encouragement at him down the table. "That was Jack. Joe wore —"

"Tops!" cried the mild man, rising in public estimation every instant.

"*Of* course," said Cousin Feenix, "you were intimate with 'em?"

"I knew them both," said the mild man. With whom Mr. Dombey immediately took wine.

"Devilish good fellow, Jack?" said Cousin Feenix, again bending forward, and smiling.

"Excellent," returned the mild man, becoming bold on his success. "One of the best fellows I ever knew."

"No doubt you have heard the story?" said Cousin Feenix.

"I shall know," replied the bold mild man, "when I have heard your Ludship tell it." With that, he leaned back in his chair and smiled at the ceiling, as knowing it by heart, and being already tickled.

"In point of fact, it's nothing of a story in itself," said Cousin Feenix, addressing the table with a smile, and a gay shake of his head, "and not worth a word of preface. But it's illustrative of the neatness of Jack's humour. The fact is, that Jack was invited down to a marriage — which I think took place in Berkshire?"

“Shropshire,” said the bold mild man, finding himself appealed to.

“Was it? well! In point of fact it might have been in any shire,” said Cousin Feenix. “So, my friend being invited down to this marriage in Anyshire,” with a pleasant sense of the readiness of this joke, “goes. Just as some of us, having had the honour of being invited to the marriage of my lovely and accomplished relative with my friend Dombey, didn’t require to be asked twice, and were devilish glad to be present on so interesting an occasion. — Goes — Jack goes. Now, this marriage was, in point of fact, the marriage of an uncommonly fine girl with a man for whom she didn’t care a button, but whom she accepted on account of his property, which was immense. When Jack returned to town, after the nuptials, a man he knew, meeting him in the lobby of the House of Commons says, ‘Well Jack, how are the ill-matched couple?’ ‘Ill matched,’ says Jack. ‘Not at all. It’s a perfectly fair and equal transaction. *She* is regularly bought, and you may take your oath *he* is as regularly sold!’”

In his full enjoyment of this culminating point of his story the shudder, which had gone all round the table like an electric spark, struck Cousin Feenix, and he stopped. Not a smile occasioned by the only general topic of conversation broached that day, appeared on any face. A profound silence ensued; and the wretched mild man, who had been as innocent of any real foreknowledge of the story as the child unborn, had the exquisite misery of reading in every eye that he was regarded as the prime mover of the mischief.

Mr. Dombey’s face was not a changeful one, and being cast in its mould of state that day, showed little other apprehension of the story, if any, than that which he expressed when he said solemnly, amidst the silence, that it was “Very good.” There was

a rapid glance from Edith towards Florence, but otherwise she remained, externally, impassive and unconscious.

Through the various stages of rich meats and wines, continual gold and silver, dainties of earth, air, fire, and water, heaped-up fruits, and that unnecessary article in Mr. Dombey's banquets—ice—the dinner slowly made its way: the later stages being achieved to the sonorous music of incessant double knocks, announcing the arrival of visitors, whose portion of the feast was limited to the smell thereof. When Mrs. Dombey rose, it was a sight to see her lord, with stiff throat and erect head, hold the door open for the withdrawal of the ladies; and to see how she swept past him with his daughter on her arm.

Mr. Dombey was a grave sight, behind the decanters, in a state of dignity; and the East India Director was a forlorn sight near the unoccupied end of the table, in a state of solitude; and the Major was a military sight, relating stories of the Duke of York to six of the seven mild men (the ambitious one was utterly quenched); and the Bank Director was a lowly sight, making a plan of his little attempt at a pinery, with dessert-knives, for a group of admirers; and Cousin Feenix was a thoughtful sight, as he smoothed his long wristbands and stealthily adjusted his wig. But all these sights were of short duration, being speedily broken up by coffee, and the desertion of the room.

There was a throng in the state-rooms up-stairs, increasing every minute; but still Mr. Dombey's list of visitors appeared to have some native impossibility of amalgamation with Mrs. Dombey's list, and no one could have doubted which was which. The single exception to this rule perhaps was Mr. Carker, who now smiled among the company, and who, as he stood in the circle that was gathered about Mrs. Dombey—watchful of her, of them, his chief, Cleopatra and the Major, Florence, and everything around—appeared at ease with both divisions of guests, and not marked as exclusively belonging to either.

Florence had a dread of him, which made his presence in the room a nightmare to her. She could not avoid the recollection of it, for her eyes were drawn towards him every now and then, by an attraction of dislike and distrust that she could not resist. Yet her thoughts were busy with other things; for as she sat apart — not unadmired or unsought, but in the gentleness of her quiet spirit — she felt how little part her father had in what was going on, and saw, with pain, how ill at ease he seemed to be, and how little regarded he was as he lingered about near the door, for those visitors whom he wished to distinguish with particular attention, and took them up to introduce them to his wife, who received them with proud coldness, but showed no interest or wish to please, and never, after the bare ceremony of reception, in consultation of his wishes, or in welcome of his friends, opened her lips. It was not the less perplexing or painful to Florence, that she who acted thus, treated her so kindly and with such loving consideration, that it almost seemed an ungrateful return on her part even to know of what was passing before her eyes.

Happy Florence would have been, might she have ventured to bear her father company, by so much as a look; and happy Florence was, in little suspecting the main cause of his uneasiness. But afraid of seeming to know that he was placed at any disadvantage, lest he should be resentful of that knowledge; and divided between her impulse towards him, and her grateful affection for Edith; she scarcely dared to raise her eyes towards either. Anxious and unhappy for them both, the thought stole on her through the crowd, that it might have been better for them if this noise of tongues and tread of feet had never come there, — if the old dulness and decay had never been replaced by novelty and splendour, — if the neglected child had found no friend in Edith, but had lived her solitary life, unpitied and forgotten.

Mrs. Chick had some such thoughts too, but they were not so quietly developed in her mind. This good matron had been outraged in the first instance by not receiving an invitation to dinner. That blow partially recovered, she had gone to a vast expense to make such a figure before Mrs. Dombey at home, as should dazzle the senses of that lady, and heap mortification, mountains high, on the head of Mrs. Skewton.

"But I am made," said Mrs. Chick to Mr. Chick, "of no more account than Florence! Who takes the smallest notice of me? No one!"

"No one, my dear," assented Mr. Chick, who has seated by the side of Mrs. Chick against the wall, and could console himself, even there, by softly whistling.

"Does it at all appear as if I was wanted here?" exclaimed Mrs. Chick, with flashing eyes.

"No my dear, I don't think it does," said Mr. Chick.

"Paul's mad!" said Mrs. Chick.

Mr. Chick whistled.

"Unless you are a monster, which I sometimes think you are," said Mrs. Chick with candour, "don't sit there humming tunes. How any one with the most distant feelings of a man, can see that mother-in-law of Paul's, dressed as she is, going on like that, with Major Bagstock, for whom, among other precious things, we are indebted to your Lucretia Tox—"

"*My* Lucretia Tox, my dear!" said Mr. Chick, astounded.

"Yes," retorted Mrs. Chick, with great severity, "*your* Lucretia Tox — I say how anybody can see that mother-in-law of Paul's, and that haughty wife of Paul's, and these indecent old frights with their backs and shoulders, and in short this at home generally, and hum—," on which word Mrs. Chick laid a scornful emphasis that made Mr. Chick start, "is, I thank Heaven, a mystery to me!"

Mr. Chick screwed his mouth into a form irreconcilable with humming or whistling, and looked very contemplative.

“But I hope I know what is due to myself,” said Mrs. Chick, swelling with indignation, “though Paul has forgotten what is due to me. I am not going to sit here, a member of this family, to be taken no notice of. I am not the dirt under Mrs. Dombey’s feet, yet—not quite yet,” said Mrs. Chick, as if she expected to become so, about the day after to-morrow. “And I shall go. I will not say (whatever I may think) that this affair has been got up solely to degrade and insult me. I shall merely go. I shall not be missed!”

Mrs. Chick rose erect with these words, and took the arm of Mr. Chick, who escorted her from the room, after half an hour’s shady sojourn there. And it is due to her penetration to observe that she certainly was not missed at all.

But she was not the only indignant guest; for Mr. Dombey’s list (still constantly in difficulties) were, as a body, indignant with Mrs. Dombey’s list, for looking at them through eye-glasses, and audibly wondering who all those people were; while Mrs. Dombey’s list complained of weariness, and the young thing with the shoulders, deprived of the attentions of that gay youth Cousin Feenix (who went away from the dinner-table), confidentially alleged to thirty or forty friends that she was bored to death. All the old ladies with the burdens on their heads, had greater or less cause of complaint against Mrs. Dombey; and the Directors and Chairmen coincided in thinking that if Dombey must marry, he had better have married somebody nearer his own age, not quite so handsome, and a little better off. The general opinion among this class of gentlemen was, that it was a weak thing in Dombey, and he’d live to repent it. Hardly anybody there, except the mild men, stayed, or went away, without considering himself or herself neglected and aggrieved by Mr. Dombey or

Mrs. Dombey; and the speechless female in the black velvet hat was found to have been stricken mute, because the lady in the crimson velvet had been handed down before her. The nature even of the mild men got corrupted, either from their curdling it with too much lemonade, or from the general inoculation that prevailed; and they made sarcastic jokes to one another, and whispered disparagement on stairs and in bye-places. The general dissatisfaction and discomfort so diffused itself, that the assembled footmen in the hall were as well acquainted with it as the company above. Nay, the very linkmen outside got hold of it, and compared the party to a funeral out of mourning, with none of the company remembered in the will.

At last, the guests were all gone, and the linkmen too; and the street, crowded so long with carriages, was clear; and the dying lights showed no one in the rooms, but Mr. Dombey and Mr. Carker, who were talking together apart, and Mrs. Dombey and her mother: the former seated on an ottoman; the latter reclining in the Cleopatra attitude, awaiting the arrival of her maid. Mr. Dombey having finished his communication to Carker, the latter advanced obsequiously to take leave.

“I trust,” he said, “that the fatigues of this delightful evening will not inconvenience Mrs. Dombey to-morrow.”

“Mrs. Dombey,” said Mr. Dombey, advancing, “has sufficiently spared herself fatigue, to relieve you from any anxiety of that kind. I regret to say, Mrs. Dombey, that I could have wished you had fatigued yourself a little more on this occasion.”

She looked at him with a supercilious glance, that it seemed not worth her while to protract, and turned away her eyes without speaking.

“I am sorry, Madam,” said Mr. Dombey, “that you should not have thought it your duty —”

She looked at him again.

“Your duty, Madam,” pursued Mr. Dombey, “to have received my friends with a little more deference. Some of those whom you have been pleased to slight to-night in a very marked manner, Mrs. Dombey, confer a distinction upon you, I must tell you, in any visit they pay you.”

“Do you know that there is some one here?” she returned, now looking at him steadily.

“No! Carker! I beg that you do not. I insist that you do not,” cried Mr. Dombey, stopping that noiseless gentleman in his withdrawal. “Mr. Carker, Madam, as you know, possesses my confidence. He is as well acquainted as myself with the subject on which I speak. I beg to tell you, for your information, Mrs. Dombey, that I consider these wealthy and important persons confer a distinction upon *me* :” and Mr. Dombey drew himself up, as having now rendered them of the highest possible importance.

“I ask you,” she repeated, bending her disdainful, steady gaze upon him, “do you know that there is some one here, Sir?”

“I must entreat,” said Mr. Carker, stepping forward, “I must beg, I must demand, to be released. Slight and unimportant as this difference is —”

Mrs. Skewton, who had been intent upon her daughter’s face, took him up here.

“My sweetest Edith,” she said, “and my dearest Dombey; our excellent friend Mr. Carker, for so I am sure I ought to mention him —”

Mr. Carker murmured, “Too much honour.”

“— has used the very words that were in my mind, and that I have been dying, these ages, for an opportunity of introducing. Slight and unimportant! My sweetest Edith, and my dearest

Dombey, do we not know that any difference between you two — No, Flowers; not now.”

Flowers was the maid, who, finding gentlemen present, retreated with precipitation.

“That any difference between you two,” resumed Mrs. Skewton, “with the Heart you possess in common, and the excessively charming bond of feeling that there is between you, *must* be slight and unimportant? What words could better define the fact? None. Therefore I am glad to take this slight occasion — this trifling occasion, that is so replete with Nature, and your individual characters, and all that — so truly calculated to bring the tears into a parent’s eyes — to say that I attach no importance to them in the least, except as developing these minor elements of Soul; and that, unlike most mamas-in-law (that odious phrase, dear Dombey!) as they have been represented to me to exist in this I fear too artificial world, I never shall attempt to interpose between you, at such a time, and never can much regret, after all, such little flashes of the torch of What ’s-his-name — not Cupid, but the other delightful creature.”

There was a sharpness in the good mother’s glance at both her children as she spoke, that may have been expressive of a direct and well-considered purpose hidden between these rambling words. That purpose, providently to detach herself in the beginning from all the clankings of their chain that were to come, and to shelter herself with the fiction of her innocent belief in their mutual affection, and their adaptation to each other.

“I have pointed out to Mrs. Dombey,” said Mr. Dombey, in his most stately manner, “that in her conduct thus early in our married life, to which I object, and which, I request, may be corrected. Carker,” with a nod of dismissal, “good night to you!”

Mr. Carker bowed to the imperious form of the Bride, whose sparkling eye was fixed upon her husband; and stopping at Cleopatra's couch on his way out, raised to his lips the hand she graciously extended to him, in lowly and admiring homage.

If his handsome wife had reproached him, or even changed countenance, or broken the silence in which she remained, by one word, now that they were alone (for Cleopatra made off with all speed), Mr. Dombey would have been equal to some assertion of his case against her. But the intense, unutterable, withering scorn, with which, after looking upon him, she dropped her eyes as if he were too worthless and indifferent to her to be challenged with a syllable — the ineffable disdain and haughtiness in which she sat before him — the cold inflexible resolve with which her every feature seemed to bear him down, and put him by — he had no resource against; and he left her, with her whole overbearing beauty concentrated on despising him.

Was he coward enough to watch her, an hour afterwards, on the old well staircase, where he had once seen Florence in the moonlight, toiling up with Paul? Or was he in the dark by accident, when, looking up, he saw her coming, with a light, from the room where Florence lay, and marked again the face so changed, which *he* could not subdue?

But it could never alter as his own did. It never, in its utmost pride and passion, knew the shadow that had fallen on his, in the dark corner, on the night of the return; and often since; and which deepened on it now, as he looked up.

CHAPTER XVII.

More warnings than one.

FLORENCE, Edith, and Mrs. Skewton, were together next day, and the carriage was waiting at the door to take them out. For Cleopatra had her galley again now, and Withers, no longer the wan, stood upright in a pigeon-breasted jacket and military trowsers, behind her wheel-less chair at dinner time, and butted no more. The hair of Withers was radiant with pomatum, in these days of down, and he wore kid gloves and smelt of the water of Cologne.

They were assembled in Cleopatra's room. The Serpent of old Nile (not to mention her disrespectfully) was reposing on her sofa sipping her morning chocolate at three o'clock in the afternoon, and Flowers the Maid was fastening on her youthful cuffs and frills, and performing a kind of private coronation ceremony on her, with a peach-coloured velvet bonnet; the artificial roses in which nodded to uncommon advantage, as the palsy trifled with them, like a breeze.

"I think I am a little nervous this morning, Flowers," said Mrs. Skewton. "My hand quite shakes."

"You were the life of the party last night, Ma'am, you know," returned Flowers, "and you suffer for it to-day, you see."

Edith, who had beckoned Florence to the window, and was looking out, with her back turned on the toilet of her esteemed mother, suddenly withdrew from it, as if it had lightened.

"My darling child," cried Cleopatra, languidly, "*you* are not nervous? Don't tell me, my dear Edith, that you, so enviably self-possessed, are beginning to be a martyr too, like your unfortunately constituted mother! Withers, some one at the door."

"Card Ma'am," said Withers, taking it towards Mrs. Dombey.

"I am going out," she said, without looking at it.

"My dear love," drawled Mrs. Skewton, "how very odd to send that message without seeing the name! Bring it here, Withers. Dear me, my love; Mr. Carker too! That very sensible person!"

"I am going out," repeated Edith, in so imperious a tone that Withers, going to the door, imperiously informed the servant who was waiting, "Mrs. Dombey is going out. Get along with you," and shut it on him.

But the servant came back after a short absence, and whispered to Withers again, who once more, and not very willingly, presented himself before Mrs. Dombey.

"If you please, Ma'am, Mr. Carker sends his respectful compliments, and begs you would spare him one minute, if you could—for business, Ma'am, if you please."

"Really, my love," said Mrs. Skewton in her mildest manner; for her daughter's face was threatening; "if you would allow me to offer a word, I should recommend—"

"Show him this way," said Edith. As Withers disappeared to execute the command, she added, frowning on her mother, "As he comes at your recommendation, let him come to your room."

"May I—shall I go away?" asked Florence, hurriedly.

Edith nodded yes, but on her way to the door Florence met the visitor coming in. With the same disagreeable mixture of familiarity and forbearance, with which he had first addressed her, he addressed her now in his softest manner—hoped she was quite well—needed not to ask, with such looks to anticipate the answer—had scarcely had the honour to know her, last night, she was so greatly changed—and held the door open for her to pass out; with a secret sense of power in her shrinking from him, that

all the deference and politeness of his manner could not quite conceal.

He then bowed himself for a moment over Mrs. Skewton's condescending hand, and lastly bowed to Edith. Coldly returning his salute without looking at him, and neither seating herself nor inviting him to be seated, she waited for him to speak.

Entrenched in her pride and power, and with all the obduracy of her spirit summoned about her, still her old conviction that she and her mother had been known by this man in their worst colours, from their first acquaintance; that every degradation she had suffered in her own eyes was as plain to him as to herself; that he read her life as though it were a vile book, and fluttered the leaves before her in slight looks and tones of voice which no one else could detect; weakened and undermined her. Proudly as she opposed herself to him, with her commanding face exacting his humility, her disdainful lip repulsing him, her bosom angry at his intrusion, and the dark lashes of her eyes sullenly veiling their light, that no ray of it might shine upon him — and submissively as he stood before her, with an entreating injured manner, but with complete submission to her will — she knew, in her own soul, that the cases were reversed, and that the triumph and superiority were his, and that he knew it full well.

“I have presumed,” said Mr. Carker, “to solicit an interview, and I have ventured to describe it as being one of business, because —”

“Perhaps you are charged by Mr. Dombey with some message of reproof,” said Edith. “You possess Mr. Dombey's confidence in such an unusual degree, Sir, that you would scarcely surprise me if that were your business.”

“I have no message to the lady who sheds a lustre upon his name,” said Mr. Carker. “But I entreat that lady, on my own behalf, to be just to a very humble claimant for justice at her hands

— a mere dependant of Mr. Dombey's — which is a position of humility; and to reflect upon my perfect helplessness last night, and the impossibility of my avoiding the share that was forced upon me in a very painful occasion."

"My dearest Edith," hinted Cleopatra in a low voice, as she held her eye-glass aside, "really very charming of Mr. What's-his-name. And full of heart!"

"For I do," said Mr. Carker, appealing to Mrs. Skewton with a look of grateful deference, — "I do venture to call it a painful occasion, though merely because it was so to me, who had the misfortune to be present. So slight a difference, as between the principals — between those who love each other with disinterested devotion, and would make any sacrifice of self, in such a cause — is nothing. As Mrs. Skewton herself expressed, with so much truth and feeling last night, it is nothing."

Edith could not look at him, but she said after a few moments, "And your business, Sir —"

"Edith, my pet," said Mrs. Skewton, "all this time, Mr. Carker is standing! My dear Mr. Carker, take a seat, I beg."

He offered no reply to the mother, but fixed his eyes on the proud daughter, as though he would only be bidden by her, and was resolved to be bidden by her. Edith, in spite of herself, sat down, and slightly motioned with her hand to him to be seated too. No action could be colder, haughtier, more insolent in its air of supremacy and disrespect, but she had struggled against even that concession ineffectually, and it was wrested from her. That was enough! Mr. Carker sat down.

"May I be allowed, Madam," said Carker, turning his white teeth on Mrs. Skewton like a light — "a lady of your excellent sense and quick feeling will give me credit, for good reason, I am sure — to address what I have to say, to Mrs. Dombey, and to leave her to impart it to you who are her best and dearest friend — next to Mr. Dombey?"

Mrs. Skewton would have retired, but Edith stopped her. Edith would have stopped him too, and indignantly ordered him to speak openly or not at all, but that he said, in a low voice — “Miss Florence — the young lady who has just left the room —”

Edith suffered him to proceed. She looked at him now. As he bent forward, to be nearer, with the utmost show of delicacy and respect, and with his teeth persuasively arrayed, in a self-depreciating smile, she felt as if she could have struck him dead.

“Miss Florence’s position,” he began, “has been an unfortunate one. I have a difficulty in alluding to it to you, whose attachment to her father is naturally watchful and jealous of every word that applies to him.” Always distinct and soft in speech, no language could describe the extent of his distinctness and softness, when he said these words, or came to any others of a similar import. “But, as one who is devoted to Mr. Dombey in his different way, and whose life is passed in admiration of Mr. Dombey’s character, may I say, without offence to your tenderness as a wife, that Miss Florence has unhappily been neglected — by her father. May I say by her father?”

Edith replied, “I know it.”

“You know it!” said Mr. Carker, with a great appearance of relief. “It removes a mountain from my breast. May I hope you know how the neglect originated; in what an amiable phase of Mr. Dombey’s pride — character, I mean?”

“You may pass that by, Sir,” she returned, “and come the sooner to the end of what you have to say.”

“Indeed, I am sensible, Madam,” replied Carker, — “trust me, I am deeply sensible, that Mr. Dombey can require no justification in anything to you. But, kindly judge of my breast by your own, and you will forgive my interest in him, if, in its excess, it goes at all astray.”

What a stab to her proud heart, to sit there, face to face with him, and have him tendering her false oath at the altar again and again for her acceptance, and pressing it upon her, like the dregs of a sickening cup she could not own her loathing of, or turn away from! How shame, remorse, and passion raged within her, when, upright and majestic in her beauty before him, she knew that in her spirit she was down at his feet!

“Miss Florence,” said Carker, “left to the care — if one may call it care — of servants and mercenary people, in every way her inferiors, necessarily wanted some guide and compass in her younger days, and, naturally, for want of them, has been indiscreet, and has in some degree forgotten her station. There was some folly about one Walter, a common lad, who is fortunately dead now: and some very undesirable association, I regret to say, with certain coasting sailors, of anything but good repute, and a runaway old bankrupt.”

“I have heard the circumstances, Sir,” said Edith, flashing her disdainful glance upon him, “and I know that you pervert them. You may not know it. I hope so.”

“Pardon me,” said Mr. Carker. “I believe that nobody knows them so well as I. Your generous and ardent nature, Madam — the same nature which is so nobly imperative in vindication of your beloved and honoured husband, and which has blessed him as even his merits deserve — I must respect, defer to, bow before. But, as regards the circumstances, which is indeed the business I presumed to solicit your attention to, I can have no doubt, since, in the execution of my trust as Mr. Dombey’s confidential — I presume to say — friend, I have fully ascertained them. In my execution of that trust; in my deep concern, which you can so well understand, for everything relating to him, intensified, if you will (for I fear I labour under your displeasure), by the lower motive of desire to prove my diligence, and make myself the more acceptable; I have long pursued these circumstances by myself and

trustworthy instruments, and have innumerable and most minute proofs."

She raised her eyes no higher than his mouth, but she saw the means of mischief vaunted in every tooth it contained.

"Pardon me, Madam," he continued, "if, in my perplexity, I presume to take counsel with you, and to consult your pleasure. I think I have observed that you are greatly interested in Miss Florence?"

What was there in her he had not observed, and did not know? Humbled and yet maddened by the thought, in every new presentment of it, however faint, she pressed her teeth upon her quivering lip to force composure on it, and distantly inclined her head in reply.

"This interest, Madam — so touching an evidence of everything associated with Mr. Dombey being dear to you — induces me to pause, before I make him acquainted with these circumstances, which, as yet, he does not know. It so far shakes me, if I may make the confession, in my allegiance, that on the intimation of the least desire to that effect from you, I would suppress them."

Edith raised her head quickly, and starting back, bent her dark glance upon him. He met it with his blandest and most deferential smile, and went on.

"You say that as I describe them, they are perverted. I fear not — I fear not: but let us assume that they are. The uneasiness I have for sometime felt on the subject, arises in this: that the mere circumstance of such association, often repeated, on the part of Miss Florence, however innocently and confidingly, would be conclusive by Mr. Dombey, already predisposed against her, and would lead him to take some step (I know he has occasionally contemplated it) of separation and alienation of her from his home. Madam, bear with me, and remember my intercourse with Mr. Dombey, and my knowledge of him, and my reference for

him, almost from childhood, when I say that if he has a fault, it is a lofty stubbornness, rooted in that noble pride and sense of power which belong to him, and which we must all defer to; which is not assailable like the obstinacy of other characters; and which grows upon itself from day to day, and year to year."

She bent her glance upon him still; but, look as steadfast as she would, her haughty nostrils dilated, and her breath came somewhat deeper, and her lip would slightly curl, as he described that in his patron to which they must all bow down. He saw it; and though his expression did not change, she knew he saw it.

"Even so slight an incident as last night's," he said, "if I might refer to it once more, would serve to illustrate my meaning, better than a greater one. Dombey and Son know neither time, nor place, nor season, but bear them all down. But I rejoice in its occurrence, for it has opened the way for me to approach Mrs. Dombey with this subject to-day, even if it has entailed upon me the penalty of her temporary displeasure. Madam, in the midst of my uneasiness and apprehension on this subject, I was summoned by Mr. Dombey to Leamington. There I saw you. There I could not help knowing what relation you would shortly occupy towards him — to his enduring happiness and yours. There I resolved to await the time of your establishment at home here, and to do as I have now done. I have, at heart, no fear that I shall be wanting in my duty to Mr. Dombey, if I bury what I know in your breast; for where there is but one heart and mind between two persons — as in such a marriage — one almost represents the other. I can acquit my conscience therefore, almost equally, by confidence, on such a theme, in you or him. For the reasons I have mentioned, I would select you. May I aspire to the distinction of believing that my confidence is accepted, and that I am relieved from my responsibility?"

He long remembered the look she gave him — who could see

it, and forget it? — and the struggle that ensued within her. At last, she said:

“I accept it, Sir. You will please to consider this matter at an end, and that it goes no farther.”

He bowed low, and rose. She rose too, and he took leave with all humility. But Withers, meeting him on the stairs, stood amazed at the beauty of his teeth, and at his brilliant smile; and as he rode away upon his white-legged horse, the people took him for a dentist, such was the dazzling show he made. The people took *her*, when she rode out in her carriage presently, for a great lady, as happy as she was rich and fine. But they had not seen her, just before, in her own room with no one by; and they had not heard her utterance of the three words, “Oh Florence, Florence!”

Mrs. Skewton, reposing on her sofa, and sipping her chocolate, had heard nothing but the low word business, for which she had a mortal aversion, insomuch that she had long banished it from her vocabulary, and had gone nigh, in a charming manner and with an immense amount of heart, to say nothing of soul, to ruin divers milliners and others in consequence. Therefore Mrs. Skewton asked no questions, and showed no curiosity. Indeed, the peach-velvet bonnet gave her sufficient occupation out of doors; for being perched on the back of her head, and the day being rather windy, it was frantic to escape from Mrs. Skewton's company, and would be coaxed into no sort of compromise. When the carriage was closed, and the wind shut out, the palsy played among the artificial roses again like an alms-house-full of superannuated zephyrs; and altogether Mrs. Skewton had enough to do, and got on but indifferently.

She got on no better towards night; for when Mrs. Dombey, in her dressing-room, had been dressed and waiting for her half an hour, and Mr. Dombey, in the drawing-room, had paraded himself into a state of solemn fretfulness (they were all three

going out to dinner), Flowers the Maid appeared with a pale face to Mrs. Dombey, saying:

“If you please, Ma’am, I beg your pardon, but I can’t do nothing with Missis!”

“What do you mean?” asked Edith.

“Well, Ma’am,” replied the frightened maid, “I hardly know. She’s making faces!”

Edith hurried with her to her mother’s room. Cleopatra was arrayed in full dress, with the diamonds, short-sleeves, rouge, curls, teeth, and other juvenility all complete; but Paralysis was not to be deceived, had known her for the object of its errand, and had struck her at her glass, where she lay like a horrible doll that had tumbled down.

They took her to pieces in very shame, and put the little of her that was real on a bed. Doctors were sent for, and soon came. Powerful remedies were resorted to; opinions given that she would rally from this shock, but would not survive another; and there she lay speechless, and staring at the ceiling, for days: sometimes making inarticulate sounds in answer to such questions as did she know who were present, and the like: sometimes giving no reply either by sign or gesture, or in her unwinking eyes.

At length she began to recover consciousness, and in some degree the power of motion, though not yet of speech. One day the use of her right hand returned; and showing it to her maid who was in attendance on her, and appearing very uneasy in her mind, she made signs for a pencil and some paper. This the maid immediately provided, thinking she was going to make a will, or write some last request; and Mrs. Dombey being from home, the maid awaited the result with solemn feelings.

After much painful scrawling and erasing, and putting in of wrong characters, which seemed to tumble out of the pencil of their own accord, the old woman produced this document:

“Rose-coloured curtains.”

The maid being perfectly transfixed, and with tolerable reason, Cleopatra amended the manuscript by adding two words more, when it stood thus:

“Rose-coloured curtains for doctors.”

The maid now perceived remotely that she wished these articles to be provided for the better presentation of her complexion to the faculty; and as those in the house who knew her best, had no doubt of the correctness of this opinion, which she was soon able to establish for herself, the rose-coloured curtains were added to her bed, and she mended with increased rapidity from that hour. She was soon able to sit up, in curls and a laced cap and night-gown, and to have a little artificial bloom dropped into the hollow caverns of her cheeks.

It was a tremendous sight to see this old woman in her finery leering and mincing at Death, and playing off her youthful tricks upon him as if he had been the Major; but an alteration in her mind that ensued on the paralytic stroke was fraught with as much matter for reflection, and was quite as ghastly.

Whether the weakening of her intellect made her more cunning and false than before, or whether it confused her between what she had assumed to be and what she really had been, or whether it had awakened any glimmering of remorse, which could neither struggle into light nor get back into total darkness, or whether, in the jumble of her faculties, a combination of these effects had been shaken up, which is perhaps the more likely supposition, the result was this: — That she became hugely exacting in respect of Edith's affection and gratitude and attention to her; highly laudatory of herself as a most inestimable parent; and very jealous of having any rival in Edith's regard. Further, in place of remembering that compact made between for an avoidance of the subject, she constantly alluded to her daughter's

marriage as a proof of her being an incomparable mother; and all this, with the weakness and peevishness of such a state, always serving for a sarcastic commentary on her levity and youthfulness.

"Where is Mrs. Dombey?" she would say to her maid.

"Gone out, Ma'am."

"Gone out! Does she go out to shun her mama, Flowers?"

"La bless you, no Ma'am. Mrs. Dombey has only gone out for a ride with Miss Florence."

"Miss Florence. Who's Miss Florence? Don't tell me about Miss Florence. What's Miss Florence to her, compared to me?"

The apposite display of the diamonds, or the peach-velvet bonnet (she sat in the bonnet to receive visitors, weeks before she could stir out of doors), or the dressing of her up in some gaud or other, usually stopped the tears that began to flow hereabouts; and she would remain in a complacent state until Edith came to see her; when, at a glance of the proud face, she would relapse again.

"Well I am sure, Edith!" she would cry, shaking her head.

"What is the matter, mother?"

"Matter! I really don't know what *is* the matter. The world is coming to such an artificial and ungrateful state, that I begin to think there's no Heart — or anything of that sort — left in it, positively. Withers is more a child to me than you are. He attends to me much more than my own daughter. I almost wish I didn't look so young — and all that kind of thing — and then perhaps I should be more considered."

"What would you have, mother?"

"Oh, a great deal, Edith," impatiently.

"Is there anything you want that you have not? It is your own fault if there be."

"My own fault!" beginning to whimper. "The parent I have been to you, Edith: making you a companion from your cradle! And when you neglect me, and have no more natural affection for me than if I was a stranger—not a twentieth part of the affection that you have for Florence—but I am only your mother and should corrupt *her* in a day!—you reproach me with its being my own fault."

"Mother, mother, I reproach you with nothing. Why will you always dwell on this?"

"Isn't it natural that I should dwell on this, when I am all affection and sensitiveness, and am wounded in the cruellest way, whenever you look at me?"

"I do not mean to wound you, mother. Have you no remembrance of what has been said between us? Let the Past rest."

"Yes, rest! And let gratitude to me, rest; and let affection for me, rest; and let *me* rest in my out-of-the-way-room, with no society and no attention, while you find new relations to make much of, who have no earthly claim upon you! Good gracious, Edith, do you know what an elegant establishment you are at the head of?"

"Yes. Hush!"

"And that gentlemanly creature, Dombey? do you know that you are married to him, Edith, and that you have a settlement, and a position, and a carriage, and I don't know what?"

"Indeed, I know it mother; well."

"As you would have had with that delightful good soul—what did they call him?—Granger—if he hadn't died. And who have you to thank for all this, Edith?"

"You, mother; you."

"Then put your arms round my neck, and kiss me; and show me, Edith, that you know there never was a better mama than I

have been to you. And don't let me become a perfect fright with teasing and wearing myself at your ingratitude, or when I'm out again in society no soul will know me, not even that hateful animal, the Major."

But, sometimes, when Edith went nearer to her, and bending down her stately head, put her cold cheek to hers, the mother would draw back as if she were afraid of her, and would fall into a fit of trembling, and cry out that there was a wandering in her wits. And sometimes she would entreat her, with humility, to sit down on the chair beside her bed, and would look at her (as she sat there brooding) with a face that even the rose-coloured curtains could not make otherwise than scared and wild.

The rose-coloured curtains blushed, in course of time, on Cleopatra's bodily recovery, and on her dress — more juvenile than ever, to repair the ravages of illness—and on the rouge, and on the teeth, and on the curls, and on the diamonds, and the short sleeves, and the whole wardrobe of the doll that had tumbled down before the mirror. They blushed too, now and then, upon an indistinctness in her speech, which she turned off with a girlish giggle, and on an occasional failing in her memory, that had no rule in it, but came and went fantastically; as if in mockery of her fantastic self.

But they never blushed upon a change in the new manner of her thought and speech towards her daughter. And though that daughter often came within their influence, they never blushed upon her loveliness irradiated by a smile, or softened by the light of filial love, in its stern beauty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Miss Tox improves and old acquaintance.

THE forlorn Miss Tox, abandoned by her friend Louisa Chick, and bereft of Mr. Dombey's countenance — for no delicate pair of wedding cards, united by a silver thread, graced the chimney-glass in Princess's Place, or the harpsichord, or any of those little posts of display which Lucretia reserved for holiday occupation — became depressed in her spirits, and suffered much from melancholy. For a time the Bird Waltz was unheard in Princess's Place, the plants were neglected, and dust collected on the miniature of Miss Tox's ancestor with the powdered head and pigtail.

Miss Tox, however, was not of an age or of a disposition long to abandon herself to unavailing regrets. Only two notes of the harpsichord were dumb from disuse when the Bird Waltz again warbled and trilled in the crooked drawing-room; only one slip of geranium fell a victim to imperfect nursing, before she was gardening at her green baskets again, regularly every morning; the powdered-headed ancestor had not been under a cloud for more than six weeks, when Miss Tox breathed on his benignant visage, and polished him up with a piece of wash-leather.

Still, Miss Tox was lonely, and at a loss. Her attachments, however ludicrously shown, were real and strong; and she was, as she expressed it, "deeply hurt by the unmerited contumely she had met with from Louisa." But there was no such thing as anger in Miss Tox's composition. If she had ambled on, through life, in her soft-spoken way, without any opinions, she had, at least, got so far without any harsh passions. The mere sight of Louisa Chick in the street one day, at a considerable distance, so overpowered her milky nature, that she was fain to seek immediate refuge in a pastry-cook's, and there, in a musty little back

room usually devoted to the consumption of soups, and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere, relieve her feelings by weeping plentifully.

Against Mr. Dombey Miss Tox hardly felt that she had any reason of complaint. Her sense of that gentleman's magnificence was such, that once removed from him, she felt as if her distance always had been immeasurable, and as if he had greatly condescended in tolerating her at all. No wife could be too handsome or too stately for him, according to Miss Tox's sincere opinion. It was perfectly natural that in looking for one, he should look high. Miss Tox with tears laid down this proposition, and fully admitted it, twenty times a day. She never recalled the lofty manner in which Mr. Dombey had made her subservient to his convenience and caprices, and had graciously permitted her to be one of the nurses of his little son. She only thought, in her own words, "that she had passed a great many happy hours in that house, which she must ever remember with gratification, and that she could never cease to regard Mr. Dombey as one of the most impressive and dignified of men."

Cut off, however, from the implacable Louisa, and being shy of the Major (whom she viewed with some distrust now), Miss Tox found it very irksome to know nothing of what was going on in Mr. Dombey's establishment. And as she really had got into the habit of considering Dombey and Son as the pivot on which the world in general turned, she resolved, rather than be ignorant of intelligence which so strongly interested her, to cultivate her old acquaintance, Mrs. Richards, who she knew, since her last memorable appearance before Mr. Dombey, was in the habit of sometimes holding communication with his servants. Perhaps Miss Tox, in seeking out the Toodle family, had the tender motive hidden in her breast of having somebody to whom she could talk about Mr. Dombey, no matter how humble that somebody might be.

At all events, towards the Toodle habitation Miss Tox directed her steps one evening, what time Mr. Toodle, cindery and swart, was refreshing himself with tea, in the bosom of his family. Mr. Toodle had only three stages of existence. He was either taking refreshment in the bosom just mentioned, or he was tearing through the country at from twenty-five to fifty miles an hour, or he was sleeping after his fatigues. He was always in a whirlwind or a calm, and a peaceable contented easy-going man Mr. Toodle was in either state, who seemed to have made over all his own inheritance of fuming and fretting to the engines with which he was connected, which panted, and gasped, and chafed, and wore themselves out, in a most unsparing manner, while Mr. Toodle led a mild and equable life.

"Polly, my gal," said Mr. Toodle, with a young Toodle on each knee, and two more making tea for him, and plenty more scattered about — Mr. Toodle was never out of children, but always kept a good supply on hand — "You an't seen our Biler lately, have you?"

"No," replied Polly, "but he's almost certain to look in to-night. It's his right evening, and he's very regular."

"I suppose," said Mr. Toodle, relishing his meal infinitely, "as our Biler is a doin' now about as well as a boy *can* do, eh, Polly?"

"Oh! he's a doing beautiful!" responded Polly.

"He an't got to be at all secret-like — has he Polly?" inquired Mr. Toodle.

"No!" said Mrs. Toodle, plumply.

"I'm glad he an't got to be at all secret-like, Polly," observed Mr. Toodle in his slow and measured way, and shovelling in his bread and butter with a clasp-knife, as if he were stoking himself, "because that don't look well; do it, Polly?"

"Why, of course it don't, father. How can you ask!"

"You see, my boys and gals," said Mr. Toodle, looking

round upon his family, "wotever you 're up to in a honest way, it 's my opinion as you can't do better than be open. If you find yourselves in cuttings or in tunnels, don't you play no secret games. Keep your whistles going, and let 's know where you are."

The rising Toodles set up a shrill murmur, expressive of their resolution to profit by the paternal advice.

"But what makes you say this along of Rob, father?" asked his wife, anxiously.

"Polly, old 'ooman," said Mr. Toodle, "I don't know as I said it partickler along o' Rob, I'm sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is," said Mr. Toodle, "to-be-sure!"

This profound reflection Mr. Toodle washed down with a pint mug of tea, and proceeded to solidify with a great weight of bread and butter; charging his young daughters, meanwhile, to keep plenty of hot water in the pot, as he was uncommon dry, and should take the indefinite quantity of "a sight of mugs," before his thirst was appeased.

In satisfying himself, however, Mr. Toodle was not regardless of the younger branches about him, who, although they had made their own evening repast, were on the look-out for irregular morsels, as possessing a relish. These he distributed now and then to the expectant circle, by holding out great wedges of bread and butter, to be bitten at by the family in lawful succession, and by serving out small doses of tea in like manner with a spoon; which snacks had such a relish in the mouths of these young Toodles, that, after partaking of the same, they performed private dances of ecstasy among themselves, and stood on one leg a-piece, and hopped, and indulged in other saltatory tokens of gladness. These vents for their excitement

found, they gradually closed about Mr. Toodle again, and eyed him hard as he got through more bread and butter and tea; affecting, however, to have no further expectations of their own in reference to those viands, but to be conversing on foreign subjects, and whispering confidentially.

Mr. Toodle, in the midst of this family group, and setting an awful example to his children in the way of appetite, was conveying the two young Toodles on his knees to Birmingham by special engine, and was contemplating the rest over a barrier of bread and butter, when Rob the Grinder, in his sou'wester hat and mourning slops, presented himself, and was received with a general rush of brothers and sisters.

"Well, mother!" said Rob, dutifully kissing her; "how are you mother?"

"There's my boy!" cried Polly, giving him a hug, and a pat on the back. "Secret! Bless you father, not he!"

This was intended for Mr. Toodle's private edification, but Rob the Grinder, whose withers were not unwrung, caught the words as they were spoken.

"What! father's been a saying something more again me, has he?" cried the injured innocent. "Oh, what a hard thing it is that when a cove has once gone a little wrong, a cove's own father should be always a throwing it in his face behind his back! It's enough," cried Rob, resorting to his coat-cuff in anguish of spirit, "to make a cove go and do something, out of spite!"

"My poor boy!" cried Polly, "father didn't mean anything."

"If father didn't mean anything," blubbered the injured Grinder, "why did he go and say anything, mother? Nobody thinks half so bad of me as my own father does. What a unnatural thing! I wish somebody'd take and chop my head off. Father wouldn't mind doing it, I believe, and I'd much rather he did that than t' other."

At these desperate words all the young Toodles shrieked; a pathetic effect, which the Grinder improved by ironically adjuring them not to cry for him, for they ought to hate him, they ought, if they was good boys and girls; and this so touched the youngest Toodle but one, who was easily moved, that it touched him not only in his spirit but in his wind too; making him so purple that Mr. Toodle in consternation carried him out to the water-butt, and would have put him under the tap, but for his being recovered by the sight of that instrument.

Matters having reached this point, Mr. Toodle explained, and the virtuous feelings of his son being thereby calmed, they shook hands, and harmony reigned again.

“Will you do as I do, Biler, my boy?” inquired his father, returning to his tea with new strength.

“No, thank’ee, father. Master and I had tea together.”

“And how is master, Rob?” said Polly.

“Well, I don’t know, mother; not much to boast on. There ain’t no bis’ness done, you see. He don’t know anything about it — the Cap’en don’t. There was a man come into the shop this very day, and says ‘I want a so-and-so,’ he says — some hard name or another. ‘A which?’ says the Cap’en. ‘A so-and-so,’ says the man. ‘Brother,’ says the Cap’en, ‘will you take a observation round the shop?’ ‘Well,’ says the man, ‘I’ve done it.’ ‘Do you see wot you want?’ says the Cap’en. ‘No, I don’t,’ says the man. ‘Do you know it wen you *do* see it?’ says the Cap’en. ‘No I don’t,’ says the man. ‘Why, then I tell you wot, my lad,’ says the Cap’en, ‘you’d better go back and ask wot it’s like, outside, for no more don’t I!’”

“That an’t the way to make money though, is it?” said Polly.

“Money, mother! He ’ll never make money. He has such ways as I never see. He an’t a bad master though, I ’ll say

that for him. But that an't much to me, for I don't think I shall stop with him long."

"Not stop in your place, Rob!" cried his mother; while Mr. Toodle opened his eyes.

"Not in that place p'raps," returned the Grinder, with a wink. "I shoudn't wonder — friends at court you know — but never *you* mind, mother, just now; I'm all right, that's all."

The indisputable proof afforded in these hints, and in the Grinder's mysterious manner, of his not being subject to that failing which Mr. Toodle had, by implication, attributed to him, might have led to a renewal of his wrongs, and of the sensation in the family, but for the opportune arrival of another visitor, who, to Polly's great surprise, appeared at the door, smiling patronage and friendship on all there.

"How do you do, Mrs. Richards?" said Miss Tox. "I have come to see you. May I come in?"

The cheery face of Mrs. Richards shone with a hospitable reply, and Miss Tox, accepting the proffered chair, and gracefully recognising Mr. Toodle on her way to it, untied her bonnet strings, and said that in the first place she must beg the dear children, one and all, to come and kiss her.

The ill-starred youngest Toodle but one, who would appear, from the frequency of his domestic troubles, to have been born under an unlucky planet, was prevented from performing his part in this general salutation by having fixed the sou'wester hat (with which he had been previously trifling) deep on his head, hind side before, and being unable to get it off again; which accident presenting to his terrified imagination a dismal picture of his passing the rest of his days in darkness, and in hopeless seclusion from his friends and family, caused him to struggle with great violence, and to utter suffocated cries. Being released, his face was discovered to be very hot, and red, and damp; and Miss Tox took him on her lap, much exhausted.

"You have almost forgotten me, Sir, I dare say," said Miss Tox to Mr. Toodle.

"No, Ma'am, no," said Toodle. "But we 've all on us got a little older since then."

"And how do you find yourself, Sir?" inquired Miss Tox, blandly.

"Hearty, Ma'am, thank'ee," replied Toodle. "How do *you* find *yourself*, Ma'am. Do the rheumaticks keep off pretty well, Ma'am? We must all expect to grow into 'em, as we gets on."

"Thank you," said Miss Tox. "I have not felt any inconvenience from that disorder yet."

"You 're wery fortunate, Ma'am," returned Mr. Toodle. "Many people at your time of life, Ma'am, is martyrs to it. There was my mother —" But catching his wife's eye here, Mr. Toodle judiciously buried the rest in another mug of tea.

"You never mean to say, Mrs. Richards," cried Miss Tox, looking at Rob, "that that is your —"

"Eldest, Ma'am," said Polly. "Yes, indeed it is. That's the little fellow, Ma'am, that was the innocent cause of so much."

"This here, Ma'am," said Toodle, "is him with the short legs — and they was," said Mr. Toodle, with a touch of poetry in his tone, "unusual short for leathers — as Mr. Dombey made a Grinder on."

The recollection almost overpowered Miss Tox. The subject of it had a peculiar interest for her directly. She asked him to shake hands, and congratulated his mother on his frank, ingenuous face. Rob, overhearing her, called up a look, to justify the eulogium, but it was hardly the right look.

"And now, Mrs. Richards," said Miss Tox, — "and you too, Sir," addressing Toodle — "I'll tell you, plainly and truly, what I have come here for. You may be aware, Mrs. Richards

— and, possibly, you may be aware too, Sir — that a little distance has interposed itself between me and some of my friends, and that where I used to visit a good deal, I do not visit now.”

Polly, who, with a woman's tact, understood this at once, expressed as much in a little look. Mr. Toodle, who had not the faintest idea of what Miss Tox was talking about, expressed that also, in a stare.

“Of course,” said Miss Tox, “how our little coolness has arisen is of no moment, and does not require to be discussed. It is sufficient for me to say, that I have the greatest possible respect for, and interest in, Mr. Dombey;” Miss Tox's voice faltered; “and everything that relates to him.”

Mr. Toodle, enlightened, shook his head, and said he had heard it said, and, for his own part, he did think, as Mr. Dombey was a difficult subject.

“Pray don't say so, Sir, if you please,” returned Miss Tox. “Let me entreat you not to say so, Sir, either now, or at any future time. Such observations cannot but be very painful to me, and to a gentleman, whose mind is constituted as, I am quite sure, yours is, can afford no permanent satisfaction.”

Mr. Toodle, who had not entertained the least doubt of offering a remark that would be received with acquiescence, was greatly confounded.

“All that I wish to say, Mrs. Richards,” resumed Miss Tox, — “and I address myself to you too, Sir, — is this. That any intelligence of the proceedings of the family, of the welfare of the family, of the health of the family, that reaches you, will be always most acceptable to me. That I shall be always very glad to chat with Mrs. Richards about the family, and about old times. And as Mrs. Richards and I never had the least difference (though I could wish now that we had been better acquainted, but I have no one but myself to blame for that), I hope she will not object to our being very good

friends now, and to my coming backwards and forwards here, when I like, without being a stranger. Now, I really hope Mrs. Richards," said Miss Tox, earnestly, "that you will take this, as I mean it, like a good-humoured creature, as you always were."

Polly was gratified, and showed it. Mr. Toodle didn't know whether he was gratified or not, and preserved a stolid calmness.

"You see, Mrs. Richards," said Miss Tox — "and I hope you see too, Sir — there are many little ways in which I can be slightly useful to you, if you will make no stranger of me; and in which I shall be delighted to be so. For instance, I can teach your children something. I shall bring a few little books, if you'll allow me, and some work, and of an evening now and then, they'll learn — dear me, they'll learn a great deal, I trust, and be a credit to their teacher."

Mr. Toodle, who had a great respect for learning, jerked his head approvingly at his wife, and moistened his hands with dawning satisfaction.

"Then, not being a stranger, I shall be in nobody's way," said Miss Tox, "and everything will go on, just as if I were not here. Mrs. Richards will do her mending, or her ironing, or her nursing, whatever it is, without minding me; and you'll smoke your pipe, too, if you're so disposed, Sir, won't you?"

"Thank'ee Mum," said Mr. Toodle. "Yes; I'll take my bit of backer."

"Very good of you to say so, Sir," rejoined Miss Tox, "and I really do assure you now, unfeignedly, that it will be a great comfort to me, and that whatever good I may be fortunate enough to do the children, you will more than pay back to me, if you'll enter into this little bargain comfortably, and easily, and good-naturedly, without another word about it."

The bargain was ratified on the spot; and Miss Tox found herself so much at home already, that without delay she in-

stituted a preliminary examination of the children, all round — which Mr. Toodle much admired — and booked their ages, names, and acquirements, on a piece of paper. This ceremony, and a little attendant gossip, prolonged the time until after their usual hour of going to bed, and detained Miss Tox at the Toodle fireside until it was too late for her to walk home alone. The gallant Grinder, however, being still there, politely offered to attend her to her own door; and as it was something to Miss Tox to be seen home by a youth whom Mr. Dombey had first inducted into those manly garments which are rarely mentioned by name, she very readily accepted the proposal.

After shaking hands with Mr. Toodle and Polly, and kissing all the children, Miss Tox left the house, therefore, with unlimited popularity, and carrying away with her so light a heart that it might have given Mrs. Chick offence if that good lady could have weighed it.

Rob the Grinder, in his modesty, would have walked behind, but Miss Tox desired him to keep beside her, for conversational purposes; and, as she afterwards expressed it to his mother, “drew him out,” upon the road.

He drew out so bright, and clear, and shining, that Miss Tox was charmed with him. The more Miss Tox drew him out, the finer he came — like wire. There never was a better or more promising youth — a more affectionate, steady, prudent, sober, honest, meek, candid young man — than Rob drew out, that night.

“I am quite glad,” said Miss Tox, arrived at her own door, “to know you. I hope you ’ll consider me your friend, and that you ’ll come and see me as often as you like. Do you keep a money-box?”

“Yes Ma’am,” returned Rob; “I ’m saving up, against I’ve got enough to put in the bank, Ma’am.”

"Very laudable indeed," said Miss Tox. "I'm glad to hear it. Put this half-crown into it, if you please."

"Oh thank you, Ma'am," replied Rob, "but really I couldn't think of depriving you."

"I commend your independent spirit," said Miss Tox, "but it's no deprivation, I assure you. I shall be offended if you don't take it, as a mark of my good will. Good night, Robin."

"Good night, Ma'am," said Rob, "and thank you!"

Who ran sniggering off to get change, and tossed it away with a pieman. But they never taught honour at the Grinders' School, where the system that prevailed was particularly strong in the engendering of hypocrisy. Insomuch, that many of the friends and masters of past Grinders said, if this were what came of education for the common people, let us have none. Some more rational said, let us have a better one. But the governing powers of the Grinders' Company were always ready for *them*, by picking out a few boys who had turned out well in spite of the system, and roundly asserting that they could have only turned out well because of it. Which settled the business of those objectors out of hand, and established the glory of the Grinders' Institution.

END OF VOL. II.



Dickens, Charles,

Dealings with the firm of Dombey and son, wholesale, retail and for
exportation in three volumes

Bd.: 2

Leipzig 1847

Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek -- L.angl.o.39-a(2
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11715079-7